**DRAMA: HE RAN INTO A BURNING BUILDING—TWICE**
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# Reader's Digest

CANADA'S MOST-READ MAGAZINE

MAY 2023

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# Reader's Digest

A Trusted Friend in a Complicated World

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VICKY LAM

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(BLANKET ILLUSTRATION) KATE TRAYNOR; (FLOWERS ILLUSTRATION) SERGE BLOCH


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World of
# GOOD
REASONS TO SMILE

## Below the Surface

**D**IVE INTO THE sapphire-blue waters off the coast of Cancun, Mexico, and you may find yourself finning past more than 400 life-size statues standing in defence of their oceans. Titled "The Silent Evolution," it's the work of British eco-artist Jason deCaires Taylor and calls attention to a startling fact: more than 75 percent of the world's reefs are threatened. His sculptures are crafted from sustainable, marine-grade cement and serve as an artificial habitat for aquatic life while drawing tourists away from overstressed natural-reef areas. "I incorporated as many references to climate change, habitat loss and pollution as I could; those are the defining issues of our era," Taylor told CNN Travel.



COURTESY OF JASON DECAIRES TAYLOR




Paul Blachut sits by the Lech river in Augsburg, Germany.

# Cold Water Rescue

*A quick-thinking waiter saves three women from drowning*

BY *Peter Hummel*

AT THE FLOSSLÄNDE restaurant in scenic Augsburg, Germany, waiter Paul Blachut is busy at work. It's a warm Sunday afternoon in May 2021 and many cyclists and hikers have come for refreshments at this pretty place beside the Lech river.

From behind the bar, Blachut, 24, has a good view of the river; there are stone steps that stretch some 20 metres down from the restaurant to the riverbank. He can see that, along the S-shaped shore, people are picnicking and children are playing. Many are cooling their feet in the river. The meltwater from the Alps means the water is very cold at this time of year, and it flows quickly.

MICHAEL HOCHGEMUTH

Among those enjoying the cooling water are a mother and her two teenage daughters, all in long dresses. They're standing on the edge of the riverbank, playing with an inflatable tube when, suddenly, the girls lose their footing and are caught in the river's current.

It all happens so fast. The girls desperately grab on to the tube, which their mother is sitting in, plunging her into the river, too. Now all three are being carried away by the current.

**A BYSTANDER RACES UP** the steps to the restaurant, and Blachut looks up from his work when he hears the shout: "I think three people are drowning in the Lech!"

Blachut can only see an inner tube bobbing in the river. Then he spots the three women a short distance away, flapping their arms, trying to grasp anything they can. Blachut's mind races. *Why isn't anyone helping them?* Horrified, he sees that one of the trio keeps sinking.

Despite having no lifesaving training, he sprints down to the riverbank, quickly taking his cell phone, wallet and keys from his pockets and pulling off his T-shirt. Then he jumps into the river. He doesn't care about the cold; all he can think about is saving the women. It's obvious they are helpless.

As Blachut gets closer to them, he can tell that the mother seems to be in the most trouble; her head is now submerged. She is drowning.

He recalls a movie in which a lifeguard grabs a drowning victim around the torso, pulling the person ashore while swimming on his back. Blachut tries this, but the woman's clothing makes her so heavy; he keeps being dragged under, too. He needs a new plan.

Improvising, Blachut dives under the drowning woman, pushing her upward and using that momentum to hurl her toward the shore. He can't recall if it took three, four or five thrusts, but at some point, an onlooker is able to get close enough to grab the woman's hand, pulling her to shore.

Blachut knows he needs to rescue the two daughters—and they are now further down the river. He plunges into the current again, swims quickly downstream and manages to get hold of one. He propels her toward the shore in the same way he did her mother, and is able to get her out, too.

Looking back to the river, he can see someone is helping the girl's sister—which is a good thing because the teenager in front of him is unconscious.

As Blachut gently lays her down, a bystander with medical training comes forward and attends to her. An ambulance arrives about five minutes later. Thankfully, it's not long before she is conscious again and reunited with her grateful sister and mother.

Several onlookers expressed their admiration for Blachut following the incident, but he is modest about his role. "The whole rescue only took two or three minutes," he says today, adding that he is happy to have received high praise from his boss for his courage. Indeed, it was a job very well done.



President Pendarovski (left) with Embla Ademi and family.

KRISTIJAN GEORGIEVSKI

**GOOD NEWS**
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

BY *Tina Knezevic*

# A PRESIDENT LEADS BY EXAMPLE

**KINDNESS** Last year, students at a school in Gostivar, North Macedonia, received quite a surprise when the country's leader showed up just before roll call.

After President Stevo Pendarovski found out that 11-year-old Embla Ademi, who has Down syndrome, was being teased by classmates and isolated from other children by teachers, he took matters into his own hands. The president, who took office in 2019, visited the family before school, offered Ademi some gifts and then walked with her, at times hand in hand, to school.

In a country where more than half of people believe that children with disabilities cannot be fully integrated into society and 81 percent believe that children with disabilities should be segregated in schools, the president's act was significant.

Pendarovski's office issued a statement that said children with atypical development "should not only enjoy the rights they deserve, but also feel equal and welcome at their school desks and in the schoolyard. It is our obligation as a state, but also as individuals, and the key element in this common mission is empathy."

## A Solution for Shelter

**ENVIRONMENT** In 2022, major floods in Pakistan killed more than 1,700 people after monsoon rains and glacial melting. Thirty-three million people were displaced and many are still living in

dire circumstances, threatened by diseases, poverty and lack of shelter.

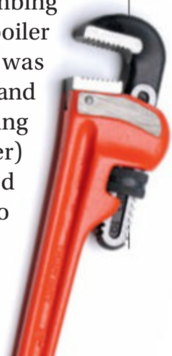
To deal with the latter, Yasmeen Lari of Karachi, Pakistan's first female architect and a co-founder of the social and cultural advocacy organization Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, has been working to distribute easy-to-assemble bamboo huts. The one-room structures are three-and-a-half metres squared and can sleep up to five people.

Lari, who is in her 80s, has a zero-carbon campus in the nearby town of Makli, where trained female artisans work in teams to make up to eight of the huts per day. She hopes to train others around the country, and the world, to do the same, expanding the reach of the relief program.

## Plumbing Services for Those in Need

**COMMUNITY** In the United Kingdom, a local plumber from Burnley, a town north of Manchester, is helping low-income families, the elderly and people with disabilities save on energy costs as prices around the world soar.

After hearing about a customer who got swindled by a plumbing company for the cost of a boiler retrofit, James Anderson was inspired to create Disability and Elderly Plumbing and Heating Emergency Repair (Depher) to provide free or discounted services to the people who need them most.



BUSYPIX/GETTY IMAGES

He has now expanded beyond Burnley; Depher has helped more than 19,000 people across the U.K. by providing services that are financed by Anderson's profits from jobs for other clients, as well as donations.

"Whatever someone in a vulnerable situation needs, if they can't find help elsewhere they turn to us for a solution," he says. "We can't just sit back—for some people it's a matter of life and death."

## India Lifts Millions out of Poverty

**DEVELOPMENT** India has historically had a high poverty rate, which as of late 2022 was defined as living on less than US$2.15 a day. But there are other ways to define poverty. That's why the United Nations Development Program and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative measure multidimensional poverty—things like health, education and the standard of living.

A 2022 report from the two groups was promising. It showed that 415 million people in India had gotten out of multidimensional poverty in the span of about 15 years. At the start of the study, in 2005-06, the incidence of multidimensional poverty in the country was 55.1 percent. By 2019-21, it had fallen to 16.4 percent.

The drop is due in part to India's efforts in sustainability, providing skills training to women and youth and increasing services to vulnerable communities.

## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

# Rainy days are good for...



**Appreciating the sun even more.**
AD GOLTSTEIN
*Netherlands*

**Baking chocolate-banana muffins.**
CLAIRE
*Canada*

**Testing a raincoat.**
ANDRE HILGERT
*Belgium*

**Reflecting upon who we are.**
PEDRO PARADA
*Venezuela*

**The snails.**
CATHERINE THIERRY
*France*

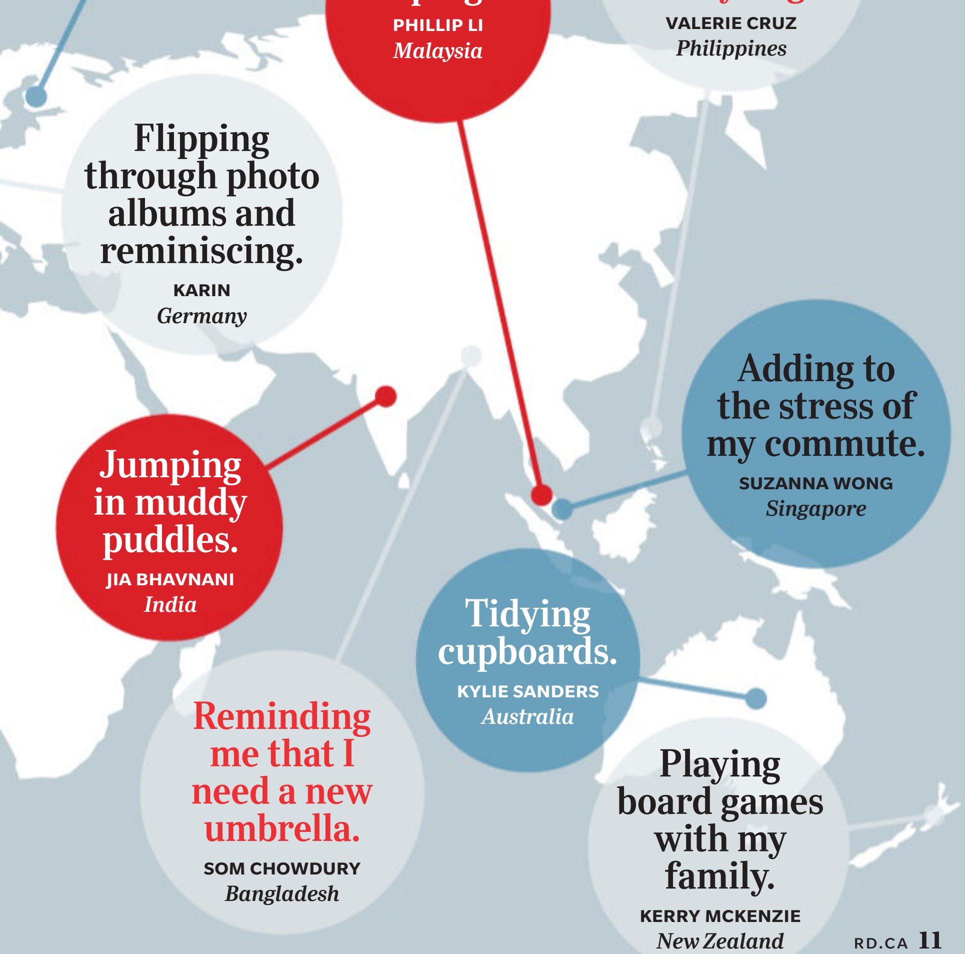
**Feeling grateful for the wonders of nature.**
ANGÉLICA SOLÍS MARTÍNEZ
*Mexico*

**Filling the reservoirs.**
PILAR MORENO
*Spain*

**Writing a song.**
ALBERTO PRIMERO
*Peru*

**Checking for leaks.**
ERIKA NIETO MONROY
*Colombia*

(MAP) SHUTTERSTOCK



**Staying indoors.**
TIMO JORTIKKA
*Finland*

**Sleeping in.**
PHILLIP LI
*Malaysia*

**Bingeing Netflix snuggled next to my dog.**
VALERIE CRUZ
*Philippines*

**Flipping through photo albums and reminiscing.**
KARIN
*Germany*

**Adding to the stress of my commute.**
SUZANNA WONG
*Singapore*

**Jumping in muddy puddles.**
JIA BHAVNANI
*India*

**Tidying cupboards.**
KYLIE SANDERS
*Australia*

**Reminding me that I need a new umbrella.**
SOM CHOWDURY
*Bangladesh*

**Playing board games with my family.**
KERRY MCKENZIE
*New Zealand*

# LIFE'S LIKE THAT



"What's this I hear about large quantities of ice, fish and small sea creatures being purchased by your department?"

P. C. VEY/CARTOONSTOCK.COM

**Security Breach**
A woman on the bus was so chatty with my daughter that she got her name, favourite colour and our pets' names in less than five minutes. I got us off the bus early, before she could get any more of my passwords.
— ABBI CRUTCHFIELD, *comedian*

**I'm never in** more of a fugue state than when someone is reading aloud the instructions to a board game.
— @FILM114

**Life Hack**
When you're too tired to do all the things on your To-Do list, try a To-Don't list. Simply write down all the things you're not going to do and then...don't do them. You get a huge sense of achievement with none of the effort.
— ELEANOR TIERNAN, *comedian*

Send us your funny stories! You could earn $50 and be featured in the magazine. See page 2 or rd.ca/joke for details.



HEALTH
*Digest*
WELLNESS FOR BODY & MIND

# Just in Case

*Does your first aid kit have all the essentials?*

BY *Anna-Kaisa Walker*

THE LAST TIME I cracked open my home's first aid kit, I had one thumb swaddled in bloody paper towels after I'd accidentally nicked it while chopping onions. Fumbling through the zippered compartments as my thumb throbbed, I discovered nothing but a few yellowed bandages, dried-out antiseptic wipes, some gauze, tape and a pair of scissors that looked like the kind kids get in kindergarten.

Luckily I managed to stem the bleeding with the gauze and went on to cook a decent spaghetti bolognese. But I'd come to the sober realization that my cheap, neglected first aid kit would do

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Kate Traynor*

my family no good in an honest-to-goodness emergency.

To help you make sure yours contains all the right things, we spoke to experts in emergency medicine. Here are the items they recommend for any first aid kit.

**ASPIRIN:** Two 81-milligram tablets of chewable acetylsalicylic acid (Aspirin) can be life-saving if taken within the first hour of a suspected heart attack. But call 911 first and await instructions; it's not safe for everyone (for example, those on other blood thinners).

**DISPOSABLE NON-LATEX GLOVES:** When helping another person, put these on to decrease the risk of disease transmission.

**HAND SANITIZER:** This can be used to clean your hands when soap and water aren't available; use it before putting on the gloves.

**ANTISEPTIC WIPES:** If you don't have access to clean running water, use these to clean and disinfect cuts before applying a bandage or ointment.

**ANTIBACTERIAL OINTMENT:** This helps prevent infection by stopping the growth of bacteria in minor wounds.

**HYDROCORTISONE CREAM:** It relieves itching and irritation from insect bites or poisonous plants. You can get it in single-use packets.

**ABDOMINAL DRESSINGS:** These large dressings can help control heavy bleeding from major wounds. Keep firm pressure on the dressed wound until help arrives.

**GAUZE:** Both the squares and the rolls are good for packing and dressing wounds, and stabilizing protruding objects (which you should never pull out).

**WATERPROOF ADHESIVE TAPE:** This firmly secures the dressing on a wound.

**SELF-ADHESIVE BANDAGES:** Have a variety of sizes in your kit, for minor cuts and scrapes.

**TRIANGULAR BANDAGE:** This can be used as an arm sling.

**TWEEZERS:** The type with pointed tips, which allow for the removal of ticks or splinters and for cleaning debris from a wound, are ideal.

**TRAUMA SHEARS:** It's worth having good scissors so you can quickly and easily cut thick bandages or clothing. Trauma shears have a sharp, serrated blade.

**CPR FACE SHIELD:** If you need to perform rescue breaths, these shields, with a one-way valve, are a good barrier against bacteria and viruses.

**INSTANT COLD PACKS:** Activated when you squeeze them, they help reduce pain and swelling for muscle sprains or bruises.

**BURN HYDROGEL:** Gel-saturated burn pads cool and soothe damaged skin; they're ideal when it's not possible to run skin under cool water.

**MYLAR BLANKET:** These "space blankets" help maintain a person's core temperature after a severe injury or shock.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO KEEP these items nearby and accessible, because you never know when you'll need them. In the United States, more medically reported injuries happen at home than



in public places, at the workplace and on the road—combined. In Canada, one-quarter of accidental falls requiring emergency care happen at home, and in the European Union, seven percent of adults experience an injury-causing accident at home or during a leisure pursuit every year.

Yet many of us are unprepared: 70 percent of Britons say their household isn't ready for an emergency, and 44 percent of Americans don't own a first aid kit, even though it's considered an essential item for your home, car and camping pack.

"First aid kits are most commonly used for minor injuries like cuts, but they can also help you in less-common emergency situations, such as heart attacks or life-threatening bleeding," says Dr. Nathan Charlton, an emergency physician in Charlottesville, Virginia, who serves on the Scientific Advisory Council for the American Red Cross.

If you are in the market for a first aid kit, here are some basics to keep in mind.

## Buy the Right Container

Your first-aid items should be kept in a waterproof bag or an air-tight container with clear compartments that allow you to see what's inside. That way you won't have to dig around or dump things out of your kit just to see where an item is. A good quality ready-made first aid kit should have most, if not all, of what you need. Look for one created by a reputable organization like the Red

Cross or St. John Ambulance, which are sold at major retailers. If any items are missing, buy them separately.

## Check Expiry Dates

Add a monthly notification to your calendar to ensure medications in the kit are up to date. "That also reminds you why you have a first aid kit, and it may also help you recall any training you've had," Charlton says.

## Get Some Training

There's no better way to prepare yourself for emergencies than by taking a course. Around the world, organizations like the Red Cross, Red Crescent and St. John Ambulance offer basic first aid and CPR certifications that can be completed over a weekend.

**YOU CAN DOWNLOAD THE RED CROSS FIRST AID APP TO KEEP YOUR LIFE-SAVING SKILLS CURRENT**

They also publish manuals, some in pocket size that you can keep in your kit. These guides can steer you through a range of scenarios—from panic attacks to spinal injuries—with pictograms. To be even better prepared, you can download the Red Cross First Aid app on your smartphone to update and maintain your life-saving skills.

The Red Cross also offers an online course on how to recognize signs of an opioid overdose and administer the life-saving medication naloxone (or Narcan).

## Know the Essentials

When cleaning cuts, don't use hydrogen peroxide (it shouldn't be in your first aid kit). "It can cause the skin at the edges of the cut to dry out, preventing it from healing cleanly," says Lyle Karasiuk, volunteer chair of the Canadian Council for First Aid Education.

Instead, **use soap and water, then an antibacterial cream.** Any cut longer than 2.5 centimetres will need stitches, says Karasiuk, noting that you should also seek health care if bleeding does not stop after 10 minutes of pressure.

The most life-saving item may be **a tourniquet**—a device that constricts arteries in a limb to stop severe blood loss, which can kill in minutes. Use it when the bleeding from an extremity is so severe that direct pressure can't stop it. You can improvise one using a minimum two-inch-wide strip of cloth and a small tree branch, but a commercially made tourniquet is better.

The latest models consist of a wide nylon strap with a turn crank and use a locking mechanism to eliminate slack. They should be placed one hand width above the injury. "Once you apply a tourniquet, do not take it off until help arrives," says Karasiuk.

Finally, **keep a first aid kit in your car,** plus a reflective vest and a warning triangle to put beside the vehicle.

# Do Weighted Blankets Work?

BY *Diane Peters*



SLEEP IS SUPPOSED to be a natural thing, but if you wrestle with insomnia, you may be tempted to try gizmos that promise better sleep. One that might sound a little weird but that has been known to work is a weighted blanket.

"They've become the sleep tool to have," says Alanna McGinn, founder and lead sleep expert at Good Night Sleep Site, which operates out of Toronto. "I'm a huge proponent of them because they can work so well." (McGinn and her "sleep consultants" are certified by the U.S.-based Family Sleep Institute.)

About 32 percent of Americans don't get enough sleep, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; it recommends at least seven hours a night for adults. Insomnia impacts as many as 35 percent of adults from time to time, while 10 percent have chronic trouble falling and staying asleep.

Weighted blankets range between two and 14 kilograms; choose one that's around 10 percent of your body weight. Inside is a layer of plastic, glass or metal pellets surrounded by filling.

McGinn says the blanket's heaviness mimics a touch therapy called deep pressure stimulation. Just as swaddling babies can send them to sleep, these blankets help your heart and breathing rates slow and your body release feel-good hormones, including serotonin.

Are they effective? A 2020 review study in the U.S. looked at eight previous studies and concluded that weighted blankets helped reduce anxiety—but not necessarily insomnia.

But other 2020 research tells a slightly different story. A randomized controlled study in Sweden looked at 120 people with insomnia and also depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Those who used a weighted blanket had better sleep and were less tired, anxious and depressed in the day.

People with circulatory conditions such as diabetes, or breathing issues such as asthma or sleep apnea, should check with their doctor before using one. "And if you're someone who gets a little claustrophobic, it's probably not the best thing for you," adds McGinn.

*News* FROM THE

# WORLD OF MEDICINE

BY *Samantha Rideout*



## CANCER DEATHS ARE PLUMMETING

Good news on the cancer front: more people than ever are surviving it. Since around 1990, cancer death rates have fallen by around 20 to 30 percent in the United States, Canada and Western Europe. That translates into more than seven million averted deaths. The decrease is partly because powerful new treatments, such as immunotherapies and molecularly targeted treatments, arrived on the scene during the past three decades.

Meanwhile, improvements to older treatments, like radiotherapy and surgery, made them safer and more effective. We can also thank the declining smoking rate, technological innovations that help us detect tumours sooner and screening programs for colorectal, breast and cervical cancers.

## Better Breathing to Ease Hypertension

Did you know that exercising the muscles you use to breathe could help reduce your blood pressure? All you need is a hand-held gadget called an inspiratory muscle-strength training device, originally invented to help people with respiratory diseases like asthma or COPD.

To use it, plug your nose, hold it up to your mouth and inhale. The device provides resistance, forcing you to work hard to breathe in. A University of Colorado Boulder study concluded that doing 30 of these vigorous inhalations each day can reduce blood pressure. In fact, the average results were comparable to what people can achieve with medications or daily half-hour walks.

If you opt for this strategy, choose a device that offers up to 100 cmH2O, a suitably high amount of resistance. They are available in some stores, although depending on where you live you may need a doctor's prescription.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LEVI BROWN. PROP STYLIST: PHILIP SHUBIN



## Why Dogs Make Us Happy

It's known that spending time with dogs can help with anxiety or depression. But researchers at the University of Basel in Switzerland wanted to see what happens in the brain when we interact with a furry friend.

Volunteers petted either a dog or a stuffed animal with a hot-water bottle inside it while a machine measured their brain activity. Those who got to cuddle the real animal showed more activity in the prefrontal cortex, a brain region involved in social and emotional processes. This potentially therapeutic response continued even after the dog had left the room, but the petters were still connected to the machine.

## Memory-Sharpening Devices

While some research suggests smartphones can lead to forgetfulness, a recent British experiment suggests that our digital devices can act like a memory extension. Participants were shown numbered circles on a computer screen and instructed to use the mouse to drag certain circles to the left or the right in a specific order and within a time limit. The more circles they brought to the correct sides, the more money they earned.

When subjects were allowed to save the correct destinations for some of the numbers on their computer, they remembered where more of them were supposed to go. This suggests that rather than making our memories "lazy," a digital device might allow users to juggle more information.

## Peanut Allergies and Legumes

For a new French study published in *Pediatric Allergy and Immunology,* kids with peanut allergies took skin-prick or antibody tests for other legumes, like chickpeas, fenugreek, lentils, peas, broad beans and soybeans. Sixty-four percent of the subjects tested positive for being allergic to at least one of these foods.

While positive allergy tests don't always translate into real-life symptoms, people who react to peanuts may want to consult an allergist before eating other legumes.



(DOG) ROBBIE GOODALL/GETTY IMAGES; (PEANUTS) SBAYRAM/GETTY IMAGES

# LAUGHTER
THE BEST *Medicine*

**Order in the Court**
Do I enjoy randomly appointing people to judicial positions? I'll let you be the judge of that.
— IVO GRAHAM, *comedian*

**I spent a** summer in Rome, so I'm fluent in dropping that into conversation.
— @DELOISIVETE

**Loud and Clear**
An elderly couple was sitting in church when the wife noticed that people were staring at her. She leaned across to her husband and whispered, "I've just let out a silent fart. What do you think I should do?" He said, "I think you should get fresh batteries for your hearing aid."
— REDDIT.COM

**While doing her** history homework, my daughter asked me what I knew about Galileo. I said, "He's just a poor boy from a poor family."
— @MARIANA057

**Send us your original jokes! You could earn $50 and be featured in the magazine.** **See page 2 or rd.ca/joke for details.**

## THE BEST JOKE I EVER TOLD

**By Matt Chin**




**Relationships are tough now; everybody's getting ghosted. I've been ghosted, so now I know how Spotify Premium feels when somebody cancels after that 14-day free trial.**

*Matt Chin is a comedic television producer, digital creator and actor. You can find him on TikTok and Instagram @MattChinTV and at mattchin.com.*

Art of
# LIVING
FOOD, FACTS & FUN

*The taco is stewed in history*
## A Mexican Beauty

BY *Renée S. Suen*



TMB STUDIO

ONE OF THE world's favourite hand-held foods can be found just about everywhere, from barrios across Latin America to Mexican restaurants in many of the world's major cities. It's believed the word "taco" comes from the Aztec *tlahco*, which means "half" or "in the middle." According to Jeffrey Pilcher, author of *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food* (and a leading expert on the topic), the Aztec ruler Moctezuma II Xocoyotzin used tortillas prepared on hot stones as spoons to hold food.

But the modern moniker can be traced back to

PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Mark Derse*

Mexican silver miners in the 18th century; *taco* was the word for the thin sheets of paper wrapped around the gunpowder used to excavate ore.

A working-class food in Mexico, tacos were brought to America when Mexican immigrants came to work in its mines and build its railroads. First mentioned in an American newspaper in 1905, the taco was an affordable item sold by street vendors in the Southwest.

**AUTHENTIC MEXICAN TACOS USE FRESH TORTILLAS MADE FROM GROUND CORN OR WHEAT.**

The first taco-dedicated restaurant in the United States, El Cholo, opened in Los Angeles in 1923, but tacos didn't become mainstream until Taco Bell started up in 1962. Its crispy-shell version, created for the Anglo palate, became widely popular, and the fast-food chain has since opened more than 7,000 locations in countries including Japan, Saudi Arabia and India. (It has no presence in Norway, but that could one day change, thanks to a Facebook campaign called "Get Taco Bell to Norway.")

Authentic Mexican tacos use fresh tortillas made from ground corn or wheat, depending on the region. Though corn plays an integral role in Mexican culture, the invading Spanish looked down on such native foods, which they associated with "heathen" deities. They favoured wheat, since it was linked with the Holy Eucharist.

As for the fillings? The many regional variations—from *barbacoa* (barbecued meat) to *carne asada* (steak) to *nopal* (cactus), to name only a few—have been influenced by history. The Spaniards, for example, introduced pigs, which led to Yucatán's *cochinita pibil* (slow-cooked pork) taco. Head to Mexico's Pacific coast and you'll find *tacos de pescado* (fish tacos).

What about that delicious staple on any taco menu, tacos *al pastor* ("shepherd's taco"), made with pork and pineapple? When Lebanese immigrants came to Mexico in the early 20th century, they brought their shawarma tradition and vertical rotisseries. The lamb they had used for gyros and kebabs was substituted with more widely available pork and pineapple.

Tacos are a messy, delicious creation. They may be stewed in tradition, but they can be whatever you want them to be. On Taco Tuesdays, North American familes make them with store-bought crispy taco shells stuffed with ground beef, grated cheese and lettuce. The "taco night" practice has crossed the Atlantic to Scandinavia—except it's on Fridays. In Sweden it's called *Tacofredag*, and favourite toppings are yogourt sauces, pineapple, nuts and cucumber.

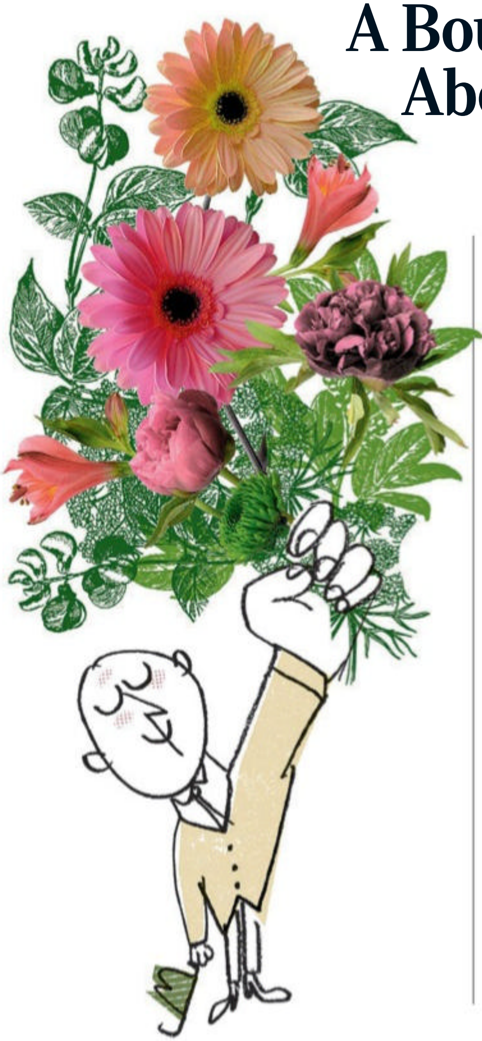
Clearly, the versatile taco can be filled to suit any palate.

TMB STUDIO



13 THINGS

# A Bouquet of Facts About Flowers



BY *Samantha Rideout*

1 ACCORDING TO the "language of flowers," also known as floriography, each month can be symbolized by a flower. May has the lily of the valley and the hawthorn, which can also mean a return to happiness.

The trend of using flowers to express emotions, which popularized the idea that red roses mean love, is credited to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, an 18th-century English poet and the wife of a British ambassador to Turkey. Interest in the concept of floriography grew across Europe and eventually led to a French book, published in 1819, called *Le langage des fleurs* by Charlotte de Latour.

2 THE MESSAGES that flowers were used to convey weren't always about love and happiness: Marigolds meant contempt, according to some manuals, and yellow roses could mean jealousy. (Florists now market yellow roses as a symbol of friendship.)



ILLUSTRATION BY *Serge Bloch*

3 FLOWERS CAN also have religious significance. For example, the *Lilium longiflorum* (Easter lily) is mentioned in the Bible as a symbol of purity and rebirth and is often associated with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The lotus flower signifies enlightenment for Buddhists because it grows in the mud but remains clean, thanks to its naturally water-repellent leaves.

4 BLOOMS ARE big business: The industry's leading auction company, Royal FloraHolland, sells more than 20 million flowers and plants each day. The Netherlands has dominated exports for decades, but the market is growing in Kenya, Ethiopia, Ecuador and Colombia. There's even a dedicated cargo area for flowers at the international airport in Nairobi, Kenya.

In the United States, flower sales peak for Mother's Day: American consumers spend about US$2.6 billion on floral arrangements each May. Altogether, the global flower industry earns more than US$30 billion.

5 KEEP A bouquet looking healthy for longer by placing it in clean water with the stems cut at an angle. To keep bacteria at bay, pluck off all leaves below the water line.

And do add flower food to your vase; many bouquets come with a packet. They typically contain sugars to supplement the blooms' nutrition, citric acid to reach an optimal pH level and bleach to fight bacteria. To make your own, mix 30 millilitres of lemon or lime juice, 15 millilitres of sugar and seven millilitres of bleach into a litre of water.

6 YOU CAN preserve cut flowers by drying them. Simply tie a string around their stems and hang them upside down somewhere dark and dry, like in a cupboard or a closet. You could also press them between the pages of a heavy book or iron them between two sheets of wax paper. Air drying tends to work well for smaller flowers, while pressing is easiest with flat ones. With big, round blooms, burying them in silica gel crystals might get the best results.

7 FLOWERS LOOK and smell lovely because they need to attract the birds and the bees—literally. The creatures carry pollen from a stamen (a male flower part) to the eggs in a pistil (a female flower part), allowing seeds to develop. Some flowers have only pistils, some have only stamens and some have both. Does this mean some plants pollinate themselves? Yes!

8 CERTAIN FLOWERS rely on the wind to carry their pollen around, which is unfortunate for people with allergies. About 15 percent of Americans reach for the tissue box when green, spiky ragweed flowers

appear in late summer and early autumn, and 25 percent of Canadians have allergic rhinitis, also known as hay fever, caused by ragweed and other pollen allergens. In the Mediterranean region, up to 30 percent of allergies are caused by parietaria —one type of which is fittingly known as "asthma weed."

9 THANKS TO the alluring aroma of flowers, it's no surprise that we've bottled their scents. During the 19th century, perfumes were often derived from the fragrance of a single flower, but as the industry evolved, the scent profiles became much more complex, made up of several natural and synthetic chemicals. Chanel No. 5, which Coco Chanel famously insisted should make the wearer "smell like a woman, not a rose," has the concentrated oil of around 12 roses and a thousand jasmine flowers in every 30-millilitre bottle.

10 ALL OVER the world, there are flower festivals for aficionados to enjoy, from California's lively Rose Parade to Ottawa's beautiful Tulip Festival. Another popular event is the Bloemencorso ("flower parade") Bollenstreek, which takes place in the Netherlands. More than a million people celebrate it each spring. The main event is a 42-kilometre parade of flower-sculpture floats covered in bulb blossoms such as hyacinths, daffodils and, of course, tulips.

11 FLOWERS ARE a favourite subject for many artists. Iconic examples include Monet's *Water Lilies,* Andy Warhol's *Flowers,* featuring hibiscus with an almost psychedelic look—and street artist Banksy's *Flower Thrower* on a wall in a small town near Jerusalem. It depicts what looks like a rioter about to throw not a weapon but a bouquet. Let's not forget Van Gogh's *Sunflowers,* which recently made headlines because activists threw tomato soup at it to protest against the use of fossil fuels.

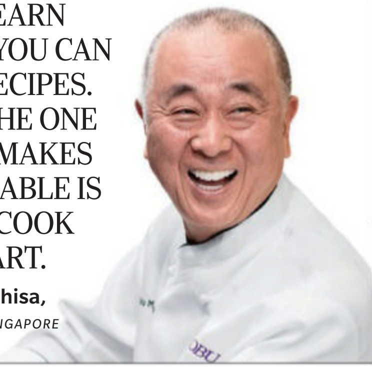
12 IN 2012, American astronaut Don Pettit planted a few seeds in plastic bags and grew them in space. As a result, a yellow zucchini blossom and a lopsided, yet cheery, sunflower became the first flowers to bloom on the International Space Station.

13 FLOWERS PLAY a role in many important life moments, and using flowers to honour the dead is not new. In Mount Carmel, Israel, archeologists discovered skeletons dating back some 13,000 years that had been lovingly placed on a bed of blooms. The deceased had been buried on a layer of mud that had preserved impressions of sages and figworts. R

# QUOTABLE QUOTES

YOU CAN LEARN TECHNIQUES, YOU CAN MEMORIZE RECIPES. BUT TO ME, THE ONE THING THAT MAKES FOOD MEMORABLE IS WHEN YOU COOK WITH HEART.

—**Nobu Matsuhisa,** CHEF, IN *VOGUE SINGAPORE*



I always hated the expression "being the voice of the victims." They have voices; what they need is a megaphone.

—**Louise Arbour,** FORMER SUPREME COURT JUSTICE AND UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, IN *MACLEAN'S*



**I'M WILLING TO INVEST IN MYSELF. I'VE ALWAYS MADE A RETURN ON THAT INVESTMENT.**

—**Tiffany Haddish,** COMEDIAN, IN THE *NEW YORK TIMES*

**JUST GO TO THE NEXT STEP. YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO TO THE FINAL STEP. JUST THE NEXT.**

—**Wynonna Judd,** MUSICIAN, IN *PEOPLE*

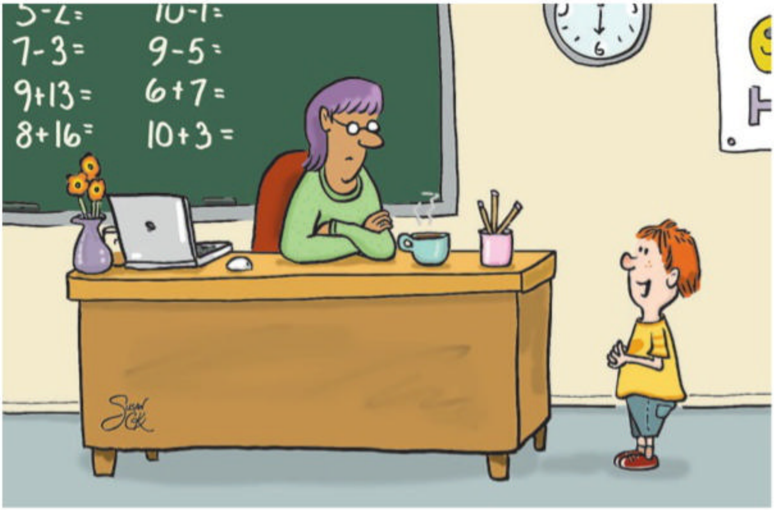
***Whether it's beauty or fashion, there's an obsession with youth. But if we're lucky, we're all going to get old.***

—**Lauren Hutton,** MODEL AND ACTOR, IN *BYRDIE*



PHOTOS: (CHEF NOBU) EVAN SUNG; (HADDISH) AMY SUSSMAN/GETTY IMAGES; (HUTTON) MELODIE JENG/GETTY IMAGES

# AS KIDS SEE IT




"My dog ate my homework but you'll be pleased to know that he gave it five stars online."

**My son asked** me if I would tell his grandma how to cut strawberries the "right way."
— @BEKINDOFWITTY

**My nine-year-old has** wanted to bake a cake for weeks, and today after I finished work we finally did it. Being so busy means it's easy to forget about making memories with my kids. I can tell she loved every one of the four minutes of it before she went to watch TV and left me to do it all.
— @THREETIMEDADDY

**My six-year-old granddaughter** wanted to play a computer game with me. I told her I had never played it before and she would have to teach me how. She replied, "That's alright,



CARTOON BY *Susan Camilleri Konar*

My daughter is still getting to grips with the "Would You Rather...?" game. Today she asked me if I'd rather be eaten by a shark or have lovely dinners every day.

— @DADOFTHREEBLOGS

Grandma. It would be my honour to teach you."
— AMANADA McLEOD, *Salt Spring Island, B.C.*

**Me:** Don't open the oven door.
**My seven-year-old:** I just want to see.
**Me:** Those are meringue cookies. If you open the oven door for anything, they will crack.
**My seven-year-old:** What if the cat opens the oven door with his paws, gets inside, closes the door behind him and is trapped? Can we open the oven door to save him?
— @MICHAELVOGEL1

**Is putting your** feet in the bathtub while your kid takes a bath and tries to stick toys between your toes considered a pedicure? I'm just going to say it is and try to feel pampered.
— CARRIE UNDERWOOD, *singer*

**My 13-year-old said** she was sick of relatives asking her, "How's school?" I wanted to know what she would prefer, and she said she wants to be asked if there's any drama at school.
— @COPYMAMA

**One year my** younger sister and a friend went door-to-door with trick-or-treat bags several days before Halloween. When told it wasn't actually Halloween yet, my sister replied, "We were practicing!"
— ELAINE PARKS, *Toronto*

**I sent my** daughter a text and she responded with, "I will look into this. Thank you." So I guess we're business associates now.
— @_WENDYB07

**A simple way** to get my kids to brush their teeth and do their homework: if they don't, they have to be a guest on my podcast.
— CONAN O'BRIEN, *comedian*

**While taking my** five-year-old to his friend's birthday party, he decided to use the birthday card to squish a bug in the car. His friend is getting a little extra surprise this year.
— @KEVINTHEDAD

**Send us your funny stories! You could earn $50 and be featured in the magazine.** **See page 2 or rd.ca/joke for details.**





# Let's Be Friends

## How to make **lasting connections** that lift you up

BY *Caitlin Walsh Miller*

PHOTOGRAPH BY *Vicky Lam*



If you feel that making friends as an adult isn't easy, you're right. "As kids, we have recess and gym class. We can let our guard down," says Marisa G. Franco, a Washington, D.C.–based professor and the author of *Platonic: How the Science of Attachment Can Help Us Make and Keep Friends.*

According to sociologists, these repeated, unplanned interactions and opportunities for vulnerability are necessary for creating the bonds of friendship. Given today's work-from-home reality, those options are fewer than ever. "And even those of us who see our colleagues every day aren't letting our guard down," adds Franco.

A 2021 survey by the American Enterprise Institute, a public policy think tank, found that the number of Americans who say they have no close friends has quadrupled since 1990, going from three percent to 12 percent. "We've never been more disconnected," says Canadian psychologist and author Jody Carrington. "And the greatest predictor for overall well-being isn't how much you drink or smoke, or what you eat. It's social engagement."

Research by Brigham Young University psychologist Julianne Holt-Lunstad has shown that loneliness is a major threat to longevity, on par with smoking 15 cigarettes a day or being an alcoholic. People who are lonely or socially isolated have a higher risk of impaired immune function, depression, dementia and cardiac death.

On the flip side, healthy friendships can help us age better, cope better with stress, and live happier, longer lives. Plus, happiness is contagious—it spreads through your social network. Harvard researchers found that when an individual becomes happy, their friends who live in a one-mile radius have a 25 percent higher change of getting a boost in happiness, too.

The researchers concluded, "People's happiness extends up to three degrees of separation; for example, to the friends of one's friends' friends."

VICKY LAM

Here are eight tips from relationship experts on making and deepening friendships.

## Don't rely only on luck

"Friendships don't just happen," says Shasta Nelson, a San Francisco–based expert on healthy relationships and the author of *Frientimacy: How to Deepen Friendships for Lifelong Health and Happiness.* And if they do, they might not be sustainable. A study published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* found that the belief that friendships were based on external or uncontrollable factors—luck, basically—predicted greater loneliness five years later.

## Be optimistic

In a 2022 study, researchers at the University of Pittsburgh found that recipients of an unexpected communication—a short note or a small gift—appreciated the gesture a lot more than the sender thought they would. Not only that, we

### Letters From America




**Christina Paino, Hauppauge, New York** When I was 10, in 1962, my sister's class was doing a pen-pal project with a school in England. I was intrigued, so her teacher gave me the name of a girl there. It was the start of our friendship.

**Betty Johnson, Hornchurch, U.K.** I liked the idea of writing to someone my age in America. In our first letters we got to know each other, finding out about our families and interests.

**Christina** We've shared everything over the years. When her son was born, I was ecstatic. When her husband died, I cried like I'd lost a family member. After 9/11, Betty wrote me the most heartfelt, loving letter.

**Betty** And when the London subway bombings happened in 2005, I had a very moving letter from Chris.

**Christina** Whether something good or sad happened, sometimes I just needed to sit down and let it flow from the heart. I shared things with her that I couldn't share with anyone else.

**Betty** Back in 1971, when we were 19, Chris and her sister visited London and we finally met each other.

**Christina** We met in Trafalgar Square. Betty had told me she'd be wearing red shoes and carrying a newspaper, so when she arrived, I knew her immediately. We hugged forever.

**Betty** I never imagined when I sent my first letter that we'd still be writing 60 years later. And emailing now is wonderful; it's as if she's closer.

**Christina** Our friendship is one of the great treasures of my life.

COURTESY OF CHRISTINA PAINO AND BETTY JOHNSON




## Unlikely Pals

**Jean-François Légaré, Montreal** I met Francis in a bar with friends when I was 29, after I'd broken up with my boyfriend of 10 years. At first, I couldn't stand Francis. He was loud and obnoxious. I left early.

**Francis Hébert, Montreal** We were like two magnets repelling each other. He was clearly annoyed by me, and the feeling was mutual. That first meeting could have been the last.

**Jean-François** But our paths kept crossing. We started talking, having debates about politics—which I never did with my other friends—and found we had a lot in common. We now have an honest relationship. He's the person I can talk to about anything. I don't agree with him a lot of the time, but you need that in your life.

**Francis** For instance, he claims to be very fashionable, despite wearing Fruit of the Loom T-shirts. But seriously, he's probably the one true friend in my life.

**Jean-François** Before I met Francis, I had friends, but I had given up on true friendship. Francis and I have that kind of best friend thing you have when you're 12 or 13. It's like finding a brother.

often underestimate how much people like us. If we assume we're going to be liked, we're more likable—warmer, friendlier and more open.

## Make a list

Write down the names of three to five people you already know but would like to be closer to, suggests Nelson. Send them a text message, an invitation for coffee, a shared photo or memory, or an article that made you think of them.

## Have multiple friends

Don't limit yourself to one close friend. "Nobody gives to you in all the ways you need," says Nelson. Indeed, a 2020 study of middle-aged women at Northern Illinois University found that those with three to five close friends had higher levels of overall satisfaction with life.

## Expect awkwardness

Awkwardness isn't a good reason to back out of a new relationship. "It's just a normal part of getting to know someone," says Nelson. For example, when we go to the gym and start to sweat, she says, "We don't panic and think, 'This must be bad for me.'" Recent research from the Kellogg School of Management shows we tend to overestimate how awkward a first meeting will be.

Gillian Sandstrom, a psychologist at the University of Sussex, England, who researches the effects of talking to

COURTESY OF JEAN-FRANÇOIS LÉGARÉ

strangers, puts it in perspective: "The other person doesn't want an awkward conversation either."

## Put the time in

Making a close friend takes time—often more than 200 hours of time together over several weeks, according to an oft-cited University of Kansas study in 2018. Both the quantity and the time frame are key. "That's why we tell people to take a class or volunteer," says Nelson. Repeated activities come with a built-in get-to-know-you schedule.

## Embrace vulnerability

Vulnerability is a cornerstone of any healthy relationship. "That's when we feel seen and known," says Nelson. To start diving deeper, she suggests asking "highlight-lowlight" questions, like what the best and most stressful part of someone's week was. "It acknowledges that it's okay if not everything's great," she says.

## Practice

"After the pandemic, many of us forgot how to socialize," says Franco. "Social skills are like muscles—we can work them." In a 2022 study by Sandstrom, participants had to talk to strangers every day for a week.

"By the end, people were less worried about being rejected and more confident they could keep the conversation going," says Sandstrom.

## Bonds Forged in Paris

**Catherine Calmeyn, Paris**
In 1994, I was going through a breakup and was alone for the first time in years. I already had a solid group of friends. Then I met Valérie; we worked for the same company. I was 25, and she was 29.

**Valérie Ruault, Joigny** Our work could be stressful, but Cat and I had a good relationship from the start, and we laughed a lot. She has a gift for listening, and I talk a lot, so we're complementary.

**Catherine** She was so sunny. I talked to her about my breakup, and she always knew what to say.

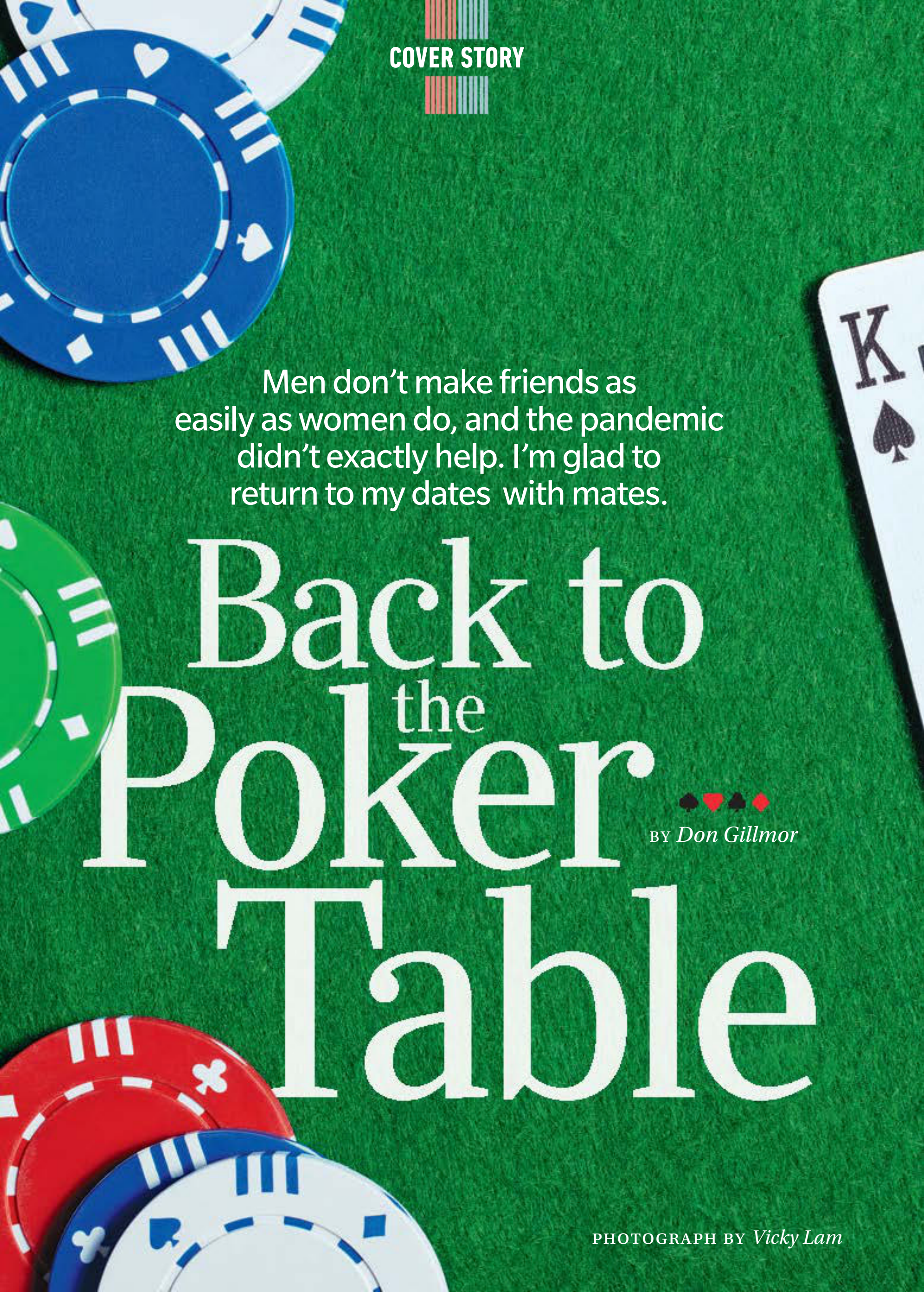
Not long ago, my son was depressed. He didn't want to see me. I was lost, and I called Val a lot. She said to have faith in him, that he just needed to know I was there. She'd call me to say it would be okay. And it was—he was.

**Valérie** Our bond is blissful. We have nothing to prove to each other, and our trust is deep.

**Catherine** We have never had a fight. We've been friends for 30 years, and though sometimes we don't connect as often as we'd like, when we do, we just pick up where we left off.




COURTESY OF CATHERINE CALMEYN AND VALÉRIE RUAULT



COVER STORY

Men don't make friends as easily as women do, and the pandemic didn't exactly help. I'm glad to return to my dates with mates.

# Back to the Poker Table

BY *Don Gillmor*

PHOTOGRAPH BY *Vicky Lam*




CARD ILLUSTRATION BY *Kathleen Fu*

Years ago, I lived beside a pessimistic 70-year-old Irish man named Steve who told me he hadn't had any friends since quitting his factory job 20 years earlier. The bowling league, tavern visits and poker games had all withered. Steve sat on his porch all day.

Across the street was 70-year-old Werner. Weather permitting, Werner sat on a battered La-Z-Boy recliner he'd set up on his lawn. The two men stared at one another but rarely talked. When Steve collapsed on his porch, Werner watched as the ambulance crew tried to revive him. I went to Steve's funeral, a subdued event (there were just four of us, including a priest who hadn't met him), and thought about the nature of male relationships.

Steve and Werner are a handy metaphor for the kind of isolation that Covid-19 has visited upon many of us, an isolation that still lingers. Though we men were heading in that direction anyway: the percentage of males with at least six close friends fell by half between 1990 and 2021, according to the Survey Center on American Life.

Simply put, men are in a friend recession. We are gifted in the art of isolation, the result of social conditioning and 10,000 years of evolutionary forces, where cooperation among men has been offset by competition. The invention of the big-screen television hasn't helped.

We can find ourselves stranded by middle age. It's easy for our friendships to drift; people move, we're occupied with children and work. We're tired, we're distracted, we change. Then there's our preference for socializing in groups rather than one-on-one, as noted in a 2020 Oxford University study. Groups are looser, less intimate. And our group activities often revolve around something—a sport, a bar, a poker game. But when the activity goes, the group can go with it.

I once reconnected with an old friend who'd played professional football and I asked him if he was in touch with any of his former teammates. No, he said, when football ended, those connections did too. Without that central activity to sustain them, they all vanished from one another's lives.

There was a time when card games or beer-league hockey or getting together with the guys to watch the Super Bowl was a sort of guilty pleasure, a vaguely senseless masculine activity. Now we're learning that these things, or at least the connectiveness they represent, are fundamental to men's mental health.

**TWENTY YEARS AGO,** I was invited to join a poker game made up of writers, a few musicians, a lawyer, a media guy. We met monthly and the game became a sort of oasis. There were literary quarrels, laughter, discussions about music and lots of stories. We didn't social-



ize much outside of the game; spouses and children got a conversational nod, but mostly remained in the background.

That poker game became part of the essential fabric of my life, and it evolved with the group. We used to start at 7 p.m. with a martini and play until 2 a.m. There are no martinis now (a lot less alcohol of any kind), and we quit before midnight. The haze of cigarette smoke is long gone. The food is better—over two decades we've gone from chips and pretzels to sushi and homemade tarte Tatin. Two of our original players died and one moved away, but the game remains, with new players joining, a new society forming.

When the pandemic arrived, we switched to Zoom games. We downloaded a poker app on our phones and looked at those nine boxes containing our heads on our computer screens. The poker app dealt all nine players instantaneously, so the Zoom version galloped along much faster than the live version, where the dealer laboriously shuffled and dealt, or stopped mid-deal to tell a story until someone finally barked, "Deal the damn cards."

Despite the efficiency, the app presented problems. It took all of our concentration to keep track, on multiple screens, of what was going on with each other and with the game. Conversational flow and easy banter didn't really happen. It was starting to feel like any online poker game, the kind played with anonymous strangers.

Two of the guys eventually pulled out, saying they'd wait until we could get together in person. A couple of months later, when our live game finally returned after a two-year break, we rejoiced. We didn't care that someone's dog ate much of the food we'd put out. We didn't mind the slow dealing, the stories and losing hands. It was just good to see everyone, to talk and to feel the comfort of the group.



**ISOLATION IS A COMMON FACTOR** in male suicide, particularly males who are middle-aged and older. It's one reason male suicide rates are three times higher than those of females. According to Robin Dunbar, an evolutionary psychologist at Oxford University, women really do have more friends than men, and women's relationships with their friends are more intense. Loneliness already played a role in men's declining mental health, but the pandemic created more isolation and a subsequent global spike in depression and anxiety.

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT MEN GET MORE FROM MALE-FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS THAN WOMEN DO.

♠♥♣♦

Workplace socializing—drinks with colleagues, lunches with clients—disappeared or was relegated to Zoom. Offices are finally opening up again, but not everyone is coming back, at least not full time. Those who are may find themselves in an almost-empty office, often a lonelier feeling than working from home.

Even though getting together with other men is beneficial for mental health, in my experience there are limitations to men's groups—the biggest one being that they just aren't conducive to discussing emotional issues. At my poker game, we celebrate one another's successes, but we rarely acknowledge failures or vulnerabilities. This can be taken to extremes; one of our poker guys died of cancer without telling any of us he was sick. We thought Bert looked a bit thin, a bit tired. Then he was gone.

In a 2018 article in the *American Journal of Men's Health* about men's social connectedness and mental health, the authors wrote that men often seek emotional connections outside of male groups, looking to their spouses or female friends, which allows us to maintain a "pattern of masculinity in public while seeking emotional support from women in private."

The Oxford University study that observed men like socializing in groups also noted that women prefer to socialize one-on-one. It's a setting more conducive to discussing fears, vulnerabilities—maybe even diagnoses.

Which is one reason friendships with women are the perfect complement to male friendship. I have a spouse to confide in, and a few women friends I regularly meet one-to-one for lunch.

The dynamic is much different than getting together with the guys, as much as I love doing that. With my female friends, we talk about our children, about work, about the state of everyone's health and our aging parents. We have a glass of wine and talk for two hours and I emerge into the afternoon light, unburdened. I like to think they do, too.

There isn't much research on male-female friendship, because as a widespread phenomenon it's relatively

recent. For centuries, men dominated the workplace and made friends there. Women were at home, meeting with their female friends.

But the research that does exist points out one obvious fact: men generally get more out of male-female friendships than women do. Women already have female friends with whom to share feelings and fears. All they gain from us is the male perspective, which may not always be uplifting.

And there are issues with heterosexual male-female friendships, chiefly sexual tension. In a study published more than 20 years ago in the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, women reported this as the least appealing aspect of having a male friend, while for men it was one of the main reasons to initiate a female friendship.

The research, while not new, supports the view made famous in *When Harry Met Sally…*, a cultural touchstone when it comes to male-female friendship. In the 1989 film, Billy Crystal says to Meg Ryan, "Men and women can't be friends because the sex part always gets in the way." Ryan asks if that means men can only be friends with women they don't find attractive. No, Crystal responds, we want to have sex with them, too.

So there are risks to male-female friendships, which can be compounded by jealous spouses (though not mine, thankfully). However, the rewards of cross-sex friendships, as researchers call them, are significant, at least for men. In these days of rampant mental health issues, and strained and underfunded health services, cross-sex friendships can be the perfect complement to male friendships, creating a place where men can be more vulnerable, more emotional.

Cross-sex relationships also tend to decline as we age, though this is changing. Today's elderly grew up in a world where there were clear lines between the sexes. Those lines have blurred with subsequent generations. One study even showed that men valued their cross-sex relationships more than same-sex friendships. (It was the opposite with women, for whom female friends remain more important.)

I'm just really glad to have both. I can meet my female friends for a nice lunch, a glass of wine, an unburdening. Then head off to poker. R

## Indulgences

**I only drink Champagne on two occasions. When I am in love and when I am not.**

COCO CHANEL

**Laughter is brightest where food is best.**

IRISH PROVERB





# INTO THE FLAMES

There was little heroic about Nick Bostic's life. He was troubled. Aimless. Then one night, everything changed.

BY *Nicholas Hune-Brown*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Steven P. Hughes*

# AT FIRST, IT WAS ALMOST IMPERCEPTIBLE— A FAINT ORANGE LIGHT

at the edge of his vision as Nick Bostic drove down the streets of Lafayette, Indiana, on a warm night last July. Bostic rolled past the two-story house before he could process what he was seeing. Then he slammed on the brakes. *Oh my god,* he thought. *That house is on fire.*

It hadn't been Bostic's best night, but it hadn't been his worst either. The 25-year-old—burly and six-foot-three, with a messy beard that often framed a mischievous grin—was still figuring out how to make his way through a life that hadn't always been easy.

Bostic had spent his childhood shuttling back and forth between his mom in Lafayette and his dad in Arkansas, with neither home providing the love and safety he needed.

If you'd asked his friends to describe him as a kid, Bostic says, they'd probably have said "a fool." He got into trouble, acted like an idiot, tried to use humour to make friends but never quite got it right.

As he got older, his troubles became more serious. Bostic began using methamphetamines. He lost friends to suicide. At times, his own life didn't feel worth living. But over the past few years, he had started to turn things around. He'd quit hard drugs. He had a girlfriend, Kara, and was working at a Papa Johns making pizzas. If people around Lafayette had to describe him now, they might say he was a guy with a big heart who maybe didn't know exactly what to do with it.

That night, July 11, 2022, Bostic had had a petty squabble with Kara and he'd stormed out of their apartment, leaving his phone behind so she couldn't contact him. He filled up her car with gas, then smoked some weed in an auto-parts store parking lot; he liked to go there when he needed to be alone. He looked up at the stars and sat in silence for 15 minutes or so. Then he decided to head home. He was on the road back to the apartment just after midnight when he saw the house on fire.

Bostic threw the car into reverse and whipped it into the driveway. Flames were climbing up the front porch, lapping at the home's walls. Hurrying out of the vehicle, he immediately regretted not having his phone. "Hey, help, the house is on fire!" he yelled into the night. A car drove past and Bostic tried to flag it down, to no avail.

He ran around to the back door, sure it would be locked. To his amazement, it swung open. Without pausing for a moment to think about the danger, Bostic ran into the burning building.

**IT WAS DATE NIGHT FOR THE BARRETTS,** and in a large family, date night was important.

The Barrett family was a lively bunch. They went to church on Sundays, and the five-bedroom, two-story house they rented was always full of yelling and laughter, with friends and family coming by for cookouts and sleepovers and volleyball games out back.

That night, four of the six Barrett kids were at home when David, a 39-year-old assistant principal at Tecumseh Junior High School, and his wife, Tiera, went out to play darts down the street. Seionna, their 18-year-old daughter, was in charge. She was taking care of Kaleia, her one-and-a-half-year-old sister. Shaylee, 13, was in the house with a friend. And Kaylani, the family's six-year-old, was roaming from room to room, looking for someone to fall asleep with.

**THE NEXT THING SEIONNA REMEMBERED WAS WAKING TO WHAT SOUNDED LIKE AN EXPLOSION.**

Kaylani hated sleeping alone. The animated little girl was so curious and trusting that David was always worried she'd just run off with a stranger. That night she walked into Seionna's bedroom on the ground floor asking if she could climb into bed with her big sister. But Seionna wasn't feeling well, and she had to work in the morning. So she told her sister to go to her own room, that they could sleep together tomorrow.

The next thing Seionna remembered was waking to what sounded like an explosion. Later, officials would find that the fire had started on the porch and then caused a propane tank next to their grill to explode. But in the moment,

Seionna only knew that there was smoke in her room. The living room next door was on fire, and she could feel the flames' heat on her skin. *Is this a dream?* she thought. Then she started to run. *I have to get the kids.*

Seionna sprinted up the stairs, grabbed Kaleia out of her crib and hurried to the next door, where Shaylee and her friend were still sound asleep. "Wake up, wake up!" she yelled.

**BOSTIC WENT UPSTAIRS. HE SEARCHED UNDER THE BUNK BED AND INSIDE THE CLOSET. NO KID.**

When she got to Kaylani's room, however, the bed was empty. The six-year-old was nowhere to be found. A horrible realization hit Seionna. Kaylani sometimes liked to sleep in the living room. And the living room was on fire.

**THE CURTAINS WERE MELTING.** That was just one of the surreal things Nick Bostic noticed as he ran through the hallway of the burning house, peering into rooms that were in flames and searching to see if anyone was home.

With the ground floor seemingly clear, Bostic headed for the staircase. He had just started climbing when he looked up and saw four faces emerge from a room at the top of the stairs and peer down at him, their eyes wide. "Your house is on fire, you need to go!" Bostic yelled.

The girls came pouring down the stairs, Bostic hurrying them along. They all rushed out into the fresh air where they huddled in a circle. "Is there anybody else in there?" Bostic asked.

"There's a baby in there!" Seionna screamed, referring to Kaylani. But neither she nor any of the kids knew where the six-year-old was. Without hesitating, Bostic ran back inside.

By now, the whole side of the house was in flames. The smell was foul and intense, like nothing he'd ever encountered. Black smoke was gathering at the ceiling, then billowing down towards him. The temperature was intense, a whoosh of pure heat that hit him like a physical object.

Bostic went upstairs. Everything looked eerily normal, with no sign there was a fire raging so near. He searched under the bunk bed and in the closet. No kid. He searched the other upstairs bedrooms and listened intently, surprised he couldn't hear a single cry.

Kaylani didn't seem to be on the second floor, so Bostic prepared to head back down. But the smoke was thick now—black and opaque, a curtain of poison that had climbed all the way to the top of the stairs. He lifted his Papa Johns T-shirt, doubling it up and trying to cover his mouth and nose, as he hesitated at the top of the stairs. Then he heard the sound of crying, from the dark smoke below.





Bostic stumbled down the stairs and into the blackness, choking on smoke. He was on a search and rescue mission, his ears alert as he tried his best to move toward the sound, arm outstretched. Then suddenly Kaylani was in front of him. Bostic quickly lifted the girl into his arms and looked for the door.

But in the smoke and heat, he was all turned around. He stumbled through the burning house, trying to find the exit. *Where is the front door?!* Disoriented, the only things he could see through the haze were the lights leading upstairs, like lanterns in a fog.

Bostic climbed back up. At the top, he tripped and fell. With the fire all around them, he thought: *We're goners.* But he managed to pull himself up, Kaylani still in his arms. Bostic remembered seeing a window on the side of the house where the fire hadn't reached, and that's where he headed.

He made it to the room and immediately tried tearing down the curtains and blinds from the window. Kaylani's ankle became entangled in a curtain cord, so he forced himself to slow down.

Finally he got the curtains and blinds off so that clean air was just one windowpane away. Still holding the little girl, Bostic punched the glass with his right hand. His fist bounced off. For his next punch, he reached back with everything he had. His fist smashed through the window, cutting up his arm as a gust of glorious fresh air filled the room. Then he quickly knocked some shards out of the frame.

As the flames advanced behind them, Bostic and Kaylani looked at the open space. Below, a strip of grass lay between this house and the next one's wooden fence. The girl peered down. "I don't want to jump out the window," she said. He was thinking the exact same thing.

But they had little choice. The flames were inching ever closer, and the heat was intensifying. Bostic took a few steps backwards. Then, without letting himself think much about what awaited them, he ran forward and threw himself out of the window.

**HOLDING KAYLANI TIGHTLY IN ONE ARM, BOSTIC RAN FORWARD AND JUMPED OUT OF THE WINDOW.**

And as he flew headlong through the air, holding Kaylani tightly in one arm, he twisted and contorted his body so as to land on the other shoulder and cushion her fall. Then they hit the ground.

**OUTSIDE, MEANWHILE,** the firefighters had arrived on the scene. They hurried Seionna and the rest of the kids away from the house—which was now entirely engulfed in flames.

"Six-year-old female and 23-year-old male, possibly inside," a firefighter called out as they rushed to put on their equipment.





Clockwise from top left: A firefighter's body camera showing Bostic and Kaylani; the destroyed house; Kaylani (red bow) and her family; Bostic recovering.





Then Bostic came stumbling out from the side of the house, Kaylani in his arms. "Take her," he yelled, the moment captured by the firefighters' body cameras. He handed over the girl—crying, but miraculously uninjured apart from a cut on her arm—before collapsing on the sidewalk calling for oxygen.

Gasping for air, the house crumbling behind him, there was only one thing on his mind. "Is the baby okay?" he asked. "Please tell me the baby's okay."

The minutes, hours and days that followed are a blur for Bostic. He remembers the paramedics pulling the tourniquet tight around the arm he'd cut punching through the window. He remembers being wheeled into the ambulance, but he doesn't remember being transferred to the hospital, where he was treated for smoke inhalation and first-degree burns to his ankle, leg and arm.

When Bostic woke up, it was with a tube down his throat and his girlfriend by his side. In bed, he thought about what had happened. He felt like he'd just done what anyone would have done in that situation. But outside the hospital, the story of Nick Bostic was already spreading. He was a hero—the pizza man who had run into a burning building not once, but twice.

A few days later, after Bostic had

been released from the hospital, the Barretts invited him and Kara to dinner at the house where they were staying. David wanted to thank the man who had saved his family in person.

The moment David saw Nick Bostic, he started crying. "He walked up to me with his arms open and held me tightly and thanked me," says Bostic. "All he could say was thank you, thank you."

That week they asked Bostic to come to church with them. And then they had him back to dinner, again and again. "I feel like God used him as a tool," says David. "And I feel like God is using me as a tool to help him as well."

The Barretts are still pulling their lives together after losing everything they owned. The fire has brought them even closer as a family and closer to their community, which came together to shelter and feed them while they looked for a new home.

Kaylani, who emerged from the fire with nothing more than a minor cut on her arm, has become delirious with a sense of fame and bravado. "She thinks of herself as a hero," says David. "The first thing she says when she meets someone is: 'I was in a fire and I jumped out a window.'"

Bostic's burns have mostly healed, though he finds his eyes have been sensitive to light since the fire. The other changes have been far greater. Bostic and Kara are expecting a child. And as news about his heroism spread, a GoFundMe account for his hospital bills exploded, reaching some $600,000—a life-changing amount of money.

Bostic offered the Barrett family some of it to help them get their life back on track, but David was firm. That was Bostic's money. He should support his child, and use that gift to spend time with his family. Then he introduced the now 26-year-old to a financial advisor.

When Bostic thinks about what happened, it somehow feels like both a near-death experience and a rebirth. Even though he was the one who ran into a burning building, it's like he was the one who was rescued.

"I feel like a different person. Like I got a second chance," he says. If in the past he'd sometimes felt like a fool, that wasn't how he saw himself now. Life hadn't been easy. He knew the future, too, would be difficult. "But I'm starting to find my purpose," he says. For the first time, he's sure he'll figure it out. ®

(OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) COURTESY OF LAFAYETTE POLICE DEPARTMENT; WXIN FOX59 NEWS; COURTESY OF THE BARRETT FAMILY; DAVE BANGERT

## Economy Class

**Thrift is that habit of character that prompts one to work for what he gets, to earn what is paid him; to invest a part of his earnings; to spend wisely and well; to save, but not hoard.**

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN



# A ONCE-IGNORED WOODED ESCARPMENT SURROUNDED BY THE CONCRETE OF A MAJOR CITY HAS BECOME A REFUGE

BY *Mark Mann* FROM *BESIDE*

F

# THE PEOPLE'S
# OREST



# IF THE WEEDS

and invasive species of Montreal had a god, it would be the Falaise Saint-Jacques. Nine storeys tall and four kilometres long, the *falaise* (French for "cliff") hunches over Highway 20 in the city's southwest. Every day, 300,000 people drive past it, but if asked about the Falaise, most would say, "What's that?"

It is a strange sort of vanishing act, to be seen yet ignored by all. Planted in 1985 on an ad hoc dumping site, this rugged stretch of woodland has never received consistent upkeep by the city. Until recently, few people visited it.

But human indifference has been the forest's good fortune. While no one was looking, it evolved into a jungle-like ecosystem, bursting with tall trees and birdsong. Today it provides a refuge for foxes, groundhogs, an endangered species of brown snake and the occasional deer that wanders in along the nearby train tracks.

It's easy to fall in love with the Falaise, how it feels huge and lush and yet like a secret garden. Since 2015, some of its admirers have been taking care of it themselves: carrying out hundreds of tires and other trash by hand, clearing pathways, documenting wildlife and filling bird feeders. They call themselves *Sauvons la Falaise*—or "Let's Save the Escarpment"—and their motto is "Make the Falaise our own."

In many ways, the members of Sauvons la Falaise have been wildly successful. The city and the province are investing millions to protect the Falaise and increase the amount of surrounding parkland, with the vision of turning the escarpment into a hub for a network of green corridors around the city.

But as these transformations unfold, the forest's admirers are wondering if their wild oasis will retain the sense of freedom and community they have experienced there. Will it still be theirs?

**ON A COLD FEBRUARY DAY** in 2015, a librarian named Lisa Mintz was walking home after work when she heard the screaming of crows from beyond a nearby treeline. Though she didn't yet know it, Mintz's route took her along the top of the Falaise on an industrial road called Saint Jacques Street West. The crows she was hearing were part of a massive murder that descends on the escarpment every winter, clouding the branches of the Eastern cottonwoods, maples, willows and more. She decided to investigate.

At the time, accessing the Falaise was no easy feat. That part of Saint Jacques presents a long barricade of auto repair shops, car dealerships and hardware stores. To reach the forest you had to get past a chain-link fence, after which the escarpment drops away steeply.

Mintz, a budding birdwatcher, wasn't the type to be dissuaded. With a bit of searching, she found a gate and entered the thick bramble on the other side.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GUILLAUME SIMONEAU

Night was falling as she began her descent into the Falaise, her hat pulled low over her red hair. Stomping and sliding through the snow, she realized she would have a hard time reaching the top again. The forest felt untamed and deserted, and she became scared.

*Can I actually get lost back here?* she wondered. At last, she came across ski tracks running along a narrow trail and followed them to make her escape.

That first adventure would prove fateful for Mintz and for the Falaise, which has a way of inviting deep devotion from the people who stumble into it. In the years since, Mintz has brought thousands of people to discover the forest, and many have joined her army of volunteers and advocates. But the best part of the experience was the sense of solitude. "I felt like the first person who was ever there," Mintz says.

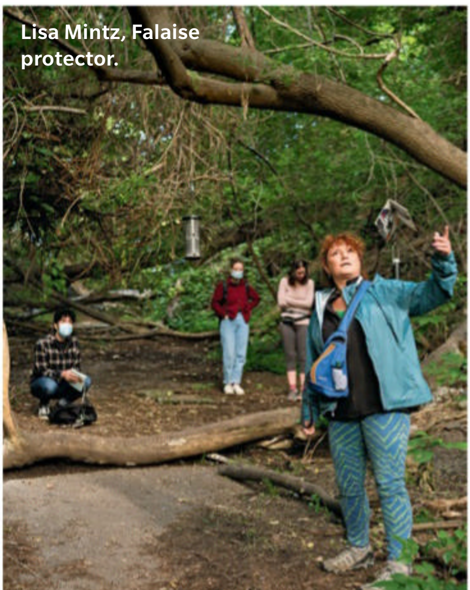
Just a hundred metres away, however, she could hear the cacophony of construction on a new $3.7-billion public infrastructure project to rebuild a criss-crossing network of highways and train tracks.

The creation of the original interchange back in the 1960s had dramatically altered the geography of the escarpment, when the slopes of the Falaise were steepened into cliffs by trucks dumping excavated dirt from the top. The renewed construction threatened to change the Falaise again.

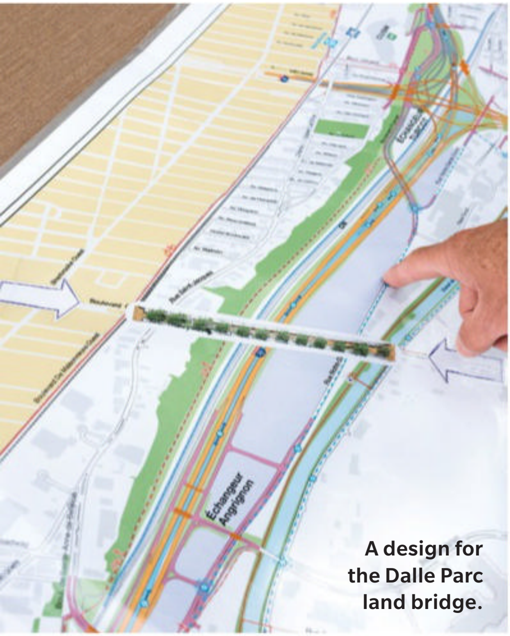
WHILE WALKING IN the forest in 2015, Mintz noticed orange markers on a large stand of trees. Alarmed, she called her city councillor, Peter McQueen, who is one of the escarpment's most devoted users.

McQueen recommended she attend an information session for the new infrastructure project the next evening. She did and was assured that the trees wouldn't be cut. But when she returned to the Falaise a few months later, they were gone.

The province of Quebec's Ministry of Transport (MTQ) had removed 165 to 200 trees, and also acquired a voluble opponent in Mintz. She formed the Facebook group Sauvons la Falaise and wrote an op-ed for the *Montreal Gazette* in which she decried the MTQ and "the environmental destruction that is taking place right before our eyes."



Lisa Mintz, Falaise protector.




A design for the Dalle Parc land bridge.

Though few people had heard of the Falaise or ever visited it, Mintz's article drew a lot of attention. The next time she came to a public consultation with the MTQ, she was joined by a band of 20-plus supporters, who in turn drew the attention of more journalists.

Sauvons la Falaise has since swelled to 400 members, and they have kept sustained pressure on the province and the city. Since she started fighting, Mintz has given more than 300 media interviews about the escarpment.

**THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF** people who visit the Falaise: the noisy ones, like Mintz, and those who prefer to stay quiet. The latter type tends to appreciate the escarpment for the very qualities that its new official status will likely imperil—namely, that it feels unsupervised and free.

During the first summer of the pandemic, teenagers built a skate park among the trees, on a less overgrown stretch of the old service road. They made a sitting area and hung a spray-painted skateboard from a tree branch, announcing "Locals Only."

"People that I hang out with are drawn to those kinds of areas, where you feel a bit secluded from everything and there's a bit more freedom," says local artist Junko, who helped build the skate park. Later that winter, he returned to the Falaise to construct a massive mechanical beast—poised like a panther mid-prowl—out of logs and car parts.

Though their interests and motivations may differ, the members of Sauvons la Falaise have made common cause with folks like Junko and the skateboarders. In 2020, Mintz ceded control of Sauvons la Falaise to a new steering committee made up of three men in their 60s: Malcolm McRae, David Gamper and Roger Jochym. They love the skate park and Junko's creation, which they call "the Falaisosaur."

Sauvons la Falaise may have started with a focus on advocacy, but the group has evolved to take on more and more of the forest's care and maintenance. The steering committee has spent the last

two summers creating a walking trail that reaches from one end to the other.

Louise Chenevert, the group's tree expert, has put up dozens of signs to mark tree species and warn visitors away from poison ivy. Biology students from nearby Concordia University have been documenting plant and insect species and conducting soil tests.

The members of Sauvons la Falaise are the forest's eyes and ears. They keep track of the dumping of salt-laden snow over its edge in winter, the weight of which destabilizes the earth and knocks trees over. This is just one of the major threats to the Falaise.

But people like Chenevert also track signs of hope, like the appearance of *Sanguinaria canadensis,* or bloodroot, a fragile spring flower traditionally used by Indigenous peoples to make red ink.

Things continue to change for the Falaise. Around the world, urban forests are increasingly recognized for the benefits they confer—such as reducing air pollution and temperatures, and improving general well-being—and the City of Montreal has taken notice.

In 2020, Mayor Valérie Plante announced the creation of a 60-hectare nature park that will encompass the escarpment, extend the amount of green space, and provide walking and cycling paths. In the summer of 2021, the MTQ created a green corridor along the base of the Falaise. Workers planted 2,800 trees and more than 60,000 shrubs and grasses across 13 hectares, nearly doubling the size of the forest.

"They did a really good job," Mintz admits. "It's native species. It's mixed forest. The trees they planted are quite large." She even sent them a nice note.

In addition, in April 2022, Montreal's executive committee approved an $8-million loan bylaw to finance landscaping work (including picnic areas and trails) and the acquisition of buildings. And there is now a new, more accessible entrance on Saint Jacques.

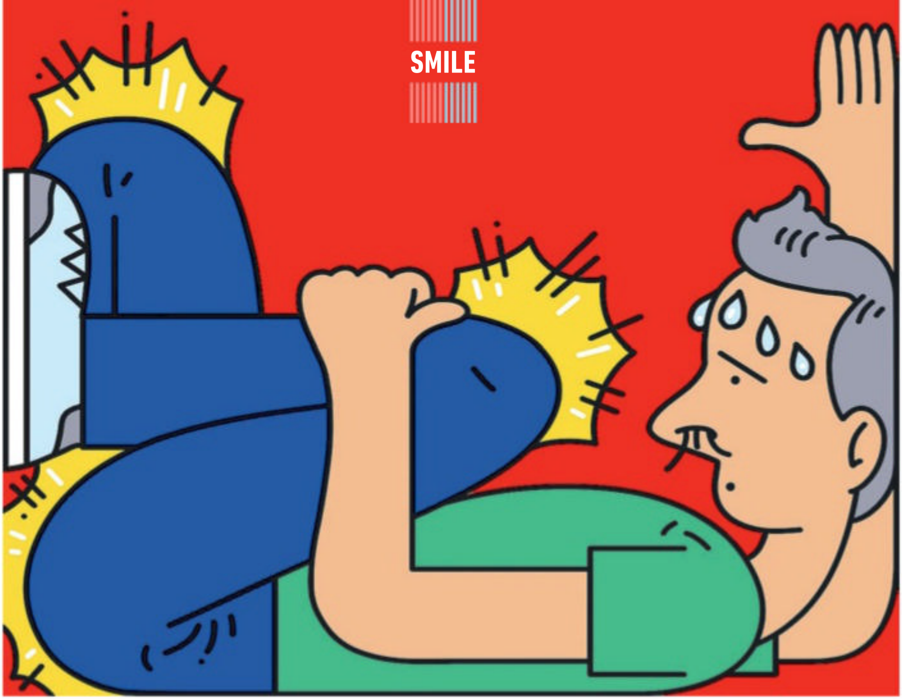
Despite these advancements, Sauvons la Falaise soldiers on. Its main goal is the construction of a land bridge, dubbed the Dalle Parc, that will extend from the top of the escarpment across the highway, where another park is slated to be built on disused land.

**IN TODAY'S FALAISE,** the "Locals Only" sign is gone. The trail is well maintained and marked with handwritten signs. The culture of the Falaise is shifting. And Mintz is working to shape its next phase so that more is gained than lost.

She has launched a charity called UrbaNature, which leads classes, workshops and nature tours in the escarpment. Says Mintz, "We see the Falaise being left alone and just used for educational purposes."

Seclusion is part of the Falaise's charm, but the escarpment didn't really come to life until a community of people adopted it. It may take a city to make a park, but only citizens can keep a forest wild. R

© 2022, *BESIDE*. FROM "THE PEOPLE'S FOREST," BY MARK MANN, BESIDE.MEDIA




# Our Perfectly Imperfect Bodies

BY Richard Glover

**MY BODY IS** nearly perfect. Well, not only mine—yours, too. Consider, for one thing, how your fingernail is tough enough to scrape off the blackened residue from the bottom of an enamel pot, yet soft enough that it doesn't leave a scratch. Despite many decades of work by the manufacturers of scouring pads, brushes and sponges, no other material has been found that so perfectly performs this simple task.

The human body has been getting a bad rap lately. Covid-19 owes much of its power to the body's occasional tendency to do battle with itself. The coronavirus can set off what's called a cytokine storm, a sometimes-fatal overreaction of the immune system. In the effort to repel the invading army, the body blows up its own munitions dump.



ILLUSTRATION BY *Sam Island*

So in times like these, it might be worth remembering all the ways that, most of the time, the body does a tip-top job.

For example, your nose is full of tiny hairs that catch dust in the air before it enters the lungs. Your throat rarely malfunctions, even though it's required to do unlikely double-service as a highway for both air and food.

Or consider this piece of genius engineering: The human forehead produces a sheen of moisture on a hot day in a way that helps the body shed heat. The hotter you get, the more sweat you produce. Clever, right?

As Bill Bryson notes in his book *The Body: A Guide for Occupants*, it is estimated that between one and five of your cells turn cancerous every day. And nearly every time, your immune system locates and kills them. As Bryson puts it: "Our bodies are a universe of 37.2 trillion cells operating in more or less perfect concert more or less all the time."

Some things, I admit, are not ideal. Take the fact that an adult male of normal proportions will, when run at by a toddler, find that his genitals are at the perfect height for a high-speed collision. If done with sufficient vigour, the impact may even prevent the creation of further children. As sibling rivalries go, that's not a bad effort.

The arrival of pimples during adolescence also remains a mystery. First of all, do they have to appear on the face, the most visible part of the body? Couldn't the body choose somewhere out of the way, like the backs of the knees? And why do outbreaks arrive at the exact moment we first become interested in matters of romance? Why can't we get the pimples over and done with when we're 10 years old and don't yet care about our appearance? Or why can't they wait until we're 90, when many of us once again don't care?

If I were an engineer overseeing the evolution of the body, I'd have also spent more time choosing some of the materials. Shouldn't the hard-working parts—the hips and knees—be made from something a bit more durable? And is it wise that the mouth is responsible for so many crucial tasks—eating, breathing and speaking?

All the same, we should be grateful for what we have. How wonderful it is that our hair grows at the rate of approximately one centimetre per month—fast enough to keep hairdressers in business, but slow enough that both hairdresser and client have something new to talk about when they meet.

And I don't know where we would be if someone hadn't thought to equip the human body with a bottom. As Australian writer Tim Winton established in his children's book *The Bugalugs Bum Thief*, human beings without backsides can't sit down; they lower themselves onto a chair and simply slide off.

Plus, without a bottom, we'd be on our feet all day, leaving us too tired for the things that all humans should find time to do—sing a song of praise to the body and all the things it (normally) does for us.

# Can Hearing Loss Be Reversed?

## The answer may be yes

BY *Vanessa Milne*

**"HI, VANESSA!** Nice to see you!" It feels good to hear those words when I see people I know. But I take it for granted that I have even heard that greeting—and, in fact, all other sounds. I never think about *how* I'm hearing things, how my brain is translating sounds into meaning.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY *Pete Ryan*



Yet the process is fascinating. The journey of a sound from outside the ear and into the brain, which takes only milliseconds, is mind-bendingly elaborate. First, the sound waves enter each ear and vibrate the paper-thin eardrum. That vibration moves two small bones that sit behind it, which begin to dance in sync with the sound waves' vibrations.

**THE TRUE IMPACT OF HEARING LOSS IS BECOMING CLEAR: IT'S A MAJOR HEALTH ISSUE.**

Then a third bone sitting against the cochlea starts to vibrate, and things get really interesting. The cochlea is a pea-sized, bony structure shaped like a snail shell and filled with fluid. It's lined with tens of thousands of hair cells topped with bundles of miniature tubes called stereocilia. That vibrating third bone beats against the cochlea, like knocking on a door. The cochlea's fluid sways, and the hair cells wave like sea anemones. That movement causes the hair cells to release chemical neurotransmitters, triggering a series of electrical messages that are carried through the auditory nerves into the auditory cortex of the brain, which translates the electrical code into meaning.

The delicate stereocilia and hair cells have a limited lifespan. We start to lose our hearing because, as they're used again and again through a lifetime of exposure to sounds at regular volume—or a shorter-term exposure to loud sounds—they can become damaged and stop doing their job. Called presbycusis, this age-related, or sensorineural, hearing loss is the most common.

If I had mild to moderate presbycusis, certain consonants would be more difficult to discern, so "Hi, Vanessa. Nice to see you!" would sound like "...i Vane…a. Nice ..o ..ee you!"

## A Widespread, and Growing, Problem

According to the World Health Organization, about 1.5 billion people have hearing loss, and that number could rise to 2.5 billion—or one in four—by 2050. People with profound hearing loss can now turn to cochlear implants. That's when an electronic cochlea—a combination of a transmitter and a processor—is placed behind the ear, and a receiver is surgically inserted under the skin there.

Aside from age-related hearing loss. there are a couple of other, less common, types. One that can actually be reversible—if it's treated early enough—is sudden sensorineural hearing loss. It can happen instantly or over the course of just a few days. There are a variety of possible causes, including infections, head trauma and autoimmune disorders. It often affects only one ear.

The condition is typically treated with corticosteroids, drugs that fight



inflammation, reduce swelling, and help your body fight off diseases. The medication is either injected directly into your ear or given orally as pills. This treatment can reduce or even reverse the hearing loss, but only if it's administered quickly.

"I know many people who have had sudden hearing loss in one ear and thought it was nothing," says Susan Scollie, who is a professor at the School of Communication Sciences and Disorders and director of the National Centre for Audiology at Western University in Ontario. It's fortunate, she says, that there is a treatment, "but if you wait too long, the hearing loss can be permanent."

For more moderate hearing loss that happens over a longer period of time, the standard treatment is hearing aids, and though they help a lot, many people who use them report that decoding speech in places with lots of background noise is still a challenge.

## More Than Just an Inconvenience

But is it such a big deal if we can't hear certain sounds? Yes, as it turns out. The true impact of hearing loss has been the subject of lots of new research and is becoming increasingly clear: it's not just an annoyance, but a major health issue.

"For a long time, hearing loss was seen as an inevitable part of aging, and relatively inconsequential," says Frank Lin, director of the Cochlear Center for Hearing and Public Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "But over the past decade, that's really been turned on its head."

Researchers have now connected hearing loss with other health problems. Studies have found that it can more than double the likelihood of having a fall, for example, and can lead to anxiety and problems sleeping.

People with hearing loss are also at risk of mental illness: a 2020 Australian review published in *Gerontologist* looked at 35 studies covering almost 150,000 people and found that hearing

loss was associated with a higher risk of depression in older adults. They suspect that people who lose their hearing don't go out and socialize as much—perhaps because they have a hard time following conversations where there is background noise—contributing to increased feelings of loneliness.

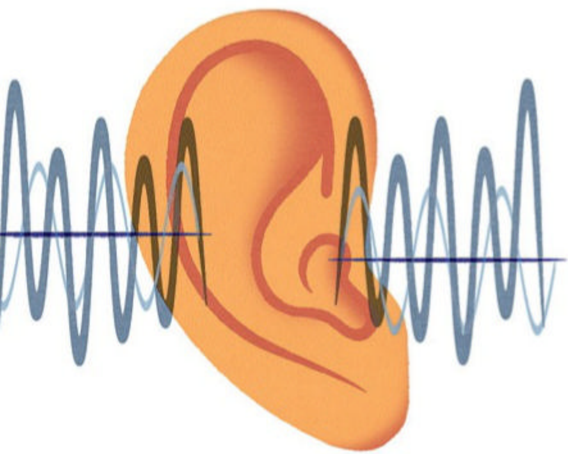
We have long known that living in isolation may be the reason hearing loss has been linked with loneliness and depression; research has shown that isolation contributes to mental illness and also increases the risk of dementia.

There is also a strong link between hearing loss and dementia. A 2020 report published in *The Lancet* identified 12 modifiable risk factors for dementia—and ranked hearing loss as the most significant one for middle-aged people. It recommended that people with hearing loss use hearing aids to mitigate its negative cognitive effects.

The reason for the link could be that people who socialize less have fewer cognitively challenging conversations. Those with mild hearing loss are twice as likely to develop dementia; moderate hearing loss means it's three times as likely; and people with profound hearing loss are five times more likely.

While hearing aids can't reverse these things or give us the same quality of hearing we once had, they might help prevent the mental-health effects.

Lin is currently running a large trial to see if using hearing aids reduces the risk of dementia, and whether or not they can help decrease the incidence of falls. The results, due around mid-2023, will tell us, for the first time, whether interventions to prevent hearing loss have reduced the risk of these other issues.



## Gene Therapy to Restore Hearing?

Other solutions are in the works. Researchers are looking at ways to help people regrow the cochlea's hair cells and stereocilia cells to restore hearing. Some have taken inspiration from the animal kingdon: When birds and reptiles suffer from hearing loss, they regrow those cells, and can hear again within a few weeks—just as our bodies regularly grow new skin cells.

New hair cells in the cochlea would mean that, instead of just turning up the volume of all noise, as hearing aids do, we'd be able to hear naturally, and easily pick out speech from background noise.

So how might this be done? By harnessing our own genes. About half of age-related hearing loss has a genetic component, says Richard Smith, a physician and director of the Molecular Otolaryngology and Renal Research Laboratories at the University of Iowa. His group offers gene testing to people with hearing loss to try to pinpoint the reason behind it, which he says provides more insights into how their hearing loss will progress.

Smith is confident that in the future, genetic testing will become more common around hearing loss, and new solutions will be available for those issues, offering a personalized approach that's different for each patient.

"There's a tremendous sense of excitement on the research side as we move forward with different types of gene therapy for hearing loss," he says. "I hope that people recognize that in the not-too-distant future we may have options besides hearing aids and cochlear implants."

Decibel Therapeutics is one company that is working to make that future a reality. It's trying to come up with gene-based solutions for hearing loss in adults.

"The idea is that you might be able to use gene-therapy technology to regrow the hair cells that have been lost," says Jonathon Whitton, audiologist, neuroscientist and senior vice-president of clinical research and development at Decibel Therapeutics in Boston.

**IN THE NOT-TOO-DISTANT FUTURE, THERE MAY BE OPTIONS BESIDES HEARING AIDS.**

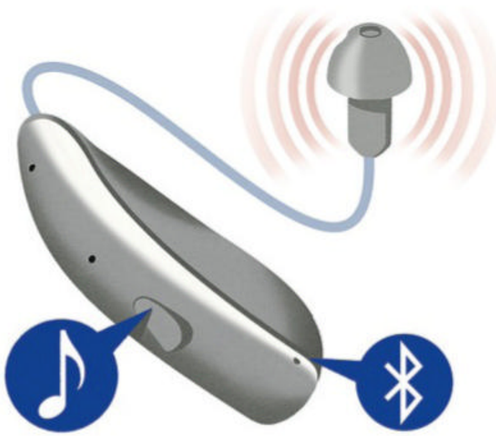
The company is researching half a dozen gene-therapy products, three of which target hair-cell regeneration. The others tackle single-gene causes of hearing loss and protecting hearing in people about to undergo a type of chemotherapy that often leads to hearing loss. Two of the treatments have moved on to the clinical-trial phase, and others that show promise will follow within the next few years.

Whitton says the advent of regenerative medicine has given scientists, health-care practitioners and patients "an emerging spirit of optimism."

## The New Hearing Aids

As potential innovations work their way through the clinical pipeline, there are better mechanical options than ever before: next-generation hearing aids.

Digital hearing aids have come a long way since their introduction in the mid-1990s. "We have gone from the first generation of digital hearing



aids to fourth- or fifth-generation ones, and there have been a lot of improvements," says Western University's Scollie.

"Many of the improvements have been small, but they add up to a better-quality product. The single hearing aid that people receive today is the technological equivalent of seven or eight hearing aids all in one."

An important one is the ability for hearing aids to automatically switch modes depending on the environment that you happen to be in: for example, changing how they would work when you're in a quiet car listening to music versus in a crowded restaurant listening to a conversation.

They also have noise-reduction capabilities, and microphones that change direction automatically. "It's like several hearing aids at once, moving back and forth seamlessly," says Scollie.

The newest features also include Bluetooth, which can be connected wirelessly to a phone to have a conversation or stream music. It's easier to hear when the voice on the other end of the phone comes through both ears, says Scollie, and it's just more convenient to be able to use hearing aids as high-quality headphones, as well. It's also possible to log in to an app to adjust the settings of your hearing aid.

A few hearing aids even do step counting, says Scollie, and she expects biometric sensors to be the next big development. This means that hearing aids would measure heartbeat and body temperature like a smartwatch does. "Measuring some of those things in the ear is actually a more appropriate location than the wrist," she explains.

## More Affordable Hearing Aids

New regulations in the United States in 2022 have made over-the-counter hearing aids a reality; it's thought that Canada might follow its lead. The United Kingdom, and many countries in Europe, already offer the option.

This means that instead of going to an audiologist and getting a hearing-aid prescription, similar to the way we get a

prescription for eyeglasses, consumers can now buy these less-expensive versions without a prescription.

**CHEAPER HEARING AIDS CAN BE A GATEWAY FOR PEOPLE WHO MAY NOT OTHERWISE BUY THEM.**

The development comes with some caveats: what if a person's sudden hearing loss is caused by an illness, for example, that needs to be treated promptly if it's to be reversed? Others worry that people who buy over-the-counter hearing aids won't get the personal fitting, adjustments and follow-up service they might need.

But on the positive side, these over-the-counter products could also act as a gateway for people who might not otherwise buy hearing aids. One study estimated that more than 80 percent of Americans with hearing loss don't wear hearing aids.

**HEARING LOSS RUNS** in my family: my grandparents needed hearing aids, and my father uses them. One day I may need them, too. His are much more advanced than my grandmother's were, complete with Bluetooth and the ability to "tune" to different situations, like crowds.

But they're still not perfect in noisy environments. I ask Decibel's Whitton whether he thinks it's possible that, by the time 40-year-olds like me are in their 50s or 60s, we might be able to use medication, not technology, to treat hearing loss?

"Yes," he says, pointing out that there is growing interest from researchers trying to solve this problem. "All these companies are being built around the idea that we can get there." R

## Lunar Phrases

**The moon's an arrant thief, and her pale fire she snatches from the sun.**

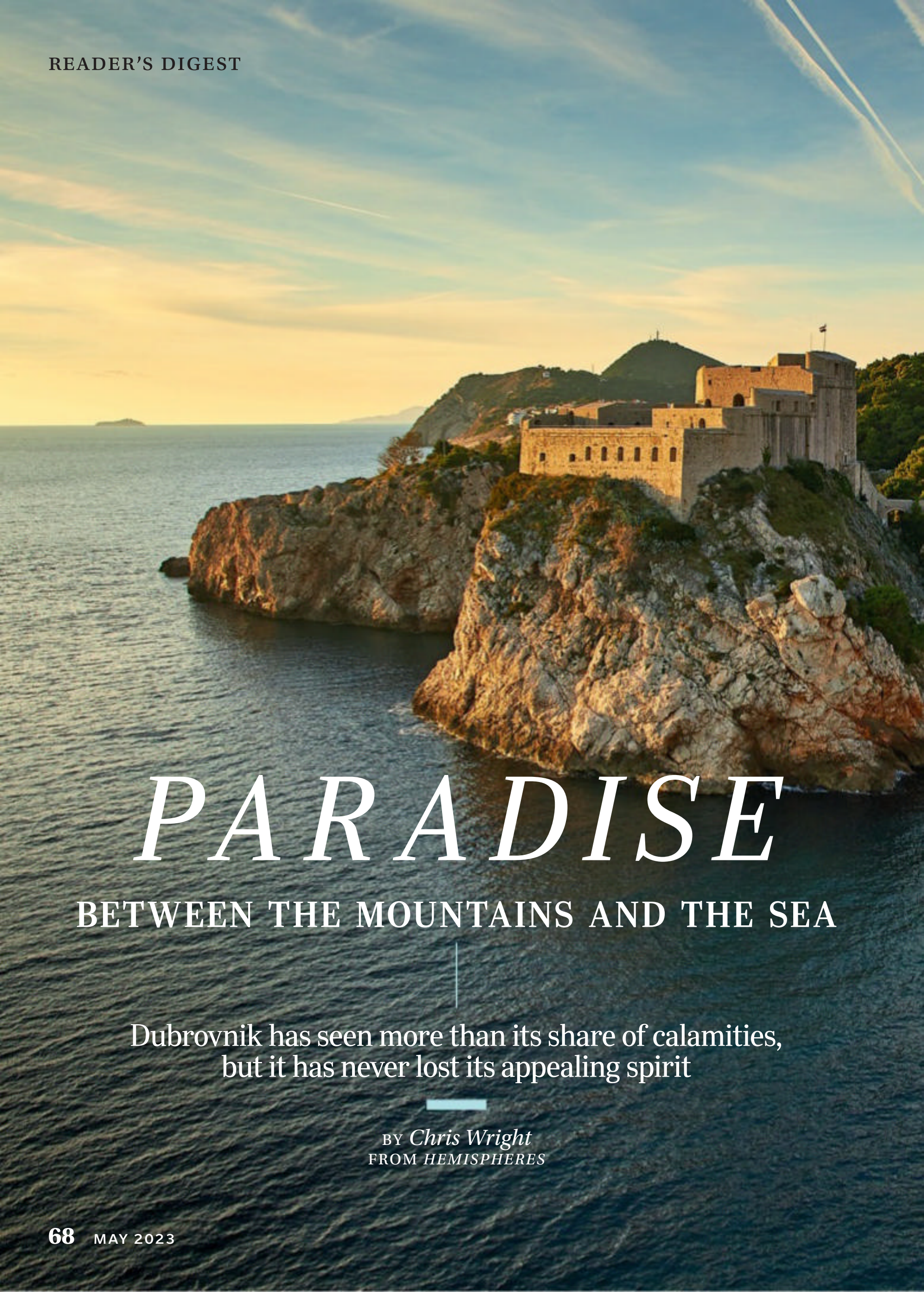
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

**There are nights when the wolves are silent and only the moon howls.**

GEORGE CARLIN

**Promises are like the full moon. If they are not kept at once they diminish day by day.**

GERMAN PROVERB



# PARADISE

## BETWEEN THE MOUNTAINS AND THE SEA

Dubrovnik has seen more than its share of calamities, but it has never lost its appealing spirit

BY *Chris Wright*
FROM *HEMISPHERES*



Fort Lovrijenac dates back to the 11th century.

**STANDING ON MY HOTEL BALCONY** on my first morning in Dubrovnik, I can see that the city hit the jackpot in terms of physical appeal. To my left is the green nub of Lokrum Island; to my right, a surging mountainside; and, straight ahead, the craggy coastline of the Adriatic Sea, culminating in the fortified walls of Old Town.

That physical appeal perhaps explains why, in spite of all manner of historical calamities—a 17th-century earthquake, Cold War Communist oppression, the Croatian War of Independence of the 1990s—the 40,000 people who live in this Croatian city burst with good humour, hope and resilience, a sense of belonging. Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw once described it as "paradise on Earth."

I descend the tree-shaded terraces and plop into the sea, enjoying the sense of seclusion before the scurry that lies ahead. Today, I'm exploring Old Town, a concentration of churches, palaces, fortifications and family homes hemmed in by the battlements and turrets of the City Walls. Even before I got here, I had a mental image of all this thanks to *Game of Thrones* (Dubrovnik was one of its major filming locations). But there's more to Old Town than what was presented in the TV blockbuster.

I enter the walled section via the medieval Ploče Gate, overseen by a statue of Sveti Vlaho, the city's patron saint, also known as St. Blaise. The real story of Dubrovnik (formerly Ragusa) begins in the seventh century, the plot line threading through years as an independent republic and thriving trading hub, occupations by foreign powers, plagues and palace intrigues. For all the seeming might of its fortifications, Old Town (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) has seen its share of devastation: A 1667 earthquake leveled the ancient city, and artillery fire rained down in the 1991–92 Siege of Dubrovnik.

The blocky limestone used in the post-quake rebuild is both sturdy and lovely to look at—luminous in the daytime, sepia-toned at night. But be warned: The stones on the main street, Stradun, are slippery when wet. At one point, I catch the eye of a pigeon as it slips and falls on a damp patch; it's an awkward moment for both of us.

Old Town's historical hodgepodge comes to a head in Luža Square, which is skirted by Baroque, Gothic and Romanesque structures. Two of the city's most dazzling churches are here—the Church of St. Blaise and Dubrovnik Cathedral—along with the grand

(PREVIOUS SPREAD) SIMON.BETTERIDGE/GETTY IMAGES



Marin Držić Theatre, whose namesake author sits outside, cast in bronze, his nose shiny from generations of rubbing.

At the entrance to the 15th-century Rector's Palace, one of the few buildings to have survived the quake, I make my way past a profusion of cherubs and vaulted arches. Beyond the colonnaded courtyard is a crypt containing an exhibition of photographs of the Siege: burning houses, kids playing in the rubble, boarded-up storefronts daubed with images of angels, boats and birds.

Crisscrossed by narrow alleys, which invariably lead to a precipitous flight of steps or a cockeyed square, Old Town is not easy to navigate—which is fine when you're having a stroll, but not so great when you're late for lunch. Finally, I find Taj Mahal, a cozy Bosnian eatery known for its hearty traditional fare, and order *buredžike,* meat-filled pastries topped with sour cream, followed by *hadžijski ćevap,* a beef and veggie stew.

At the end of Stradun, near the 15th century Pile Gate, is the Large Onofrio's Fountain, whose ornate spigots have trickled since 1438. I take a sip and cross Stradun to the Franciscan monastery, which is home to an order that dates back to the 1300s, along with an apothecary museum that displays the

(BELOW) GONZALO AZUMENDI/GETTY IMAGES



Stradun, the main street of Dubrovnik's Old Town.

scales, pipettes and cauldrons the friars used while dabbling in medicine.

I could use a restorative tonic myself, so I head for Buža Bar. Hewn into cliffs below the City Walls, it invites guests to perch on tiny vertiginous terraces, suggesting a lax approach to health and safety but a staunch dedication to social media accounts like Instagram. I totter onto one and order an Aperol spritz with a splash of vertigo. "People sometimes jump in," the waiter tells me, nodding at the frothy waves below, "but not everybody likes that." You don't say.

I later put Google Maps to the test as I search for my dinner destination among the alleys, some lined with gift shops and bars, others draped with laundry and potted plants. Eventually I find the Jesuit Stairs, which were modeled on Rome's Spanish Steps. At the top stands the wildly ornate St. Ignatius Church; beside this is Kopun, whose menu puts a modern spin on Croatian standards.

Ana Bitanga, Kopun's affable manager, waves away the idea that I try something light. "Carbs," she says, delivering a *šporki makaruli* (pasta in beef sauce). "We also serve it with croquettes—because if you can fry carbs, even better." Then come capon stewed in a porcini mushroom sauce and served with forest berries, a platter of baked peppers and a refined peasant-food dessert of egg custard, oranges and cookies.

"People here have a love of comfort," Bitanga notes. "Thank God for all the stairs."

Back at the hotel, I take in the view from the terrace. Old Town's glowing walls seem to be suspended between sea and sky, like something out of a fairy tale.

**THE NEXT MORNING,** I take the 15-minute ferry ride to Lokrum. There are dozens of islands around Dubrovnik, but Lokrum is especially popular—partly because of its proximity to the city, partly because of its staggering beauty. A kilometre long, the island bristles with a continent's worth of plant species. It also has fantastic beaches, a salty lake known as the Dead Sea (not to be confused with the one in the Middle East) and a lush botanical garden.

Bands of assertive peacocks, descendants of birds brought here in the 1850s by Austria's Archduke Maximilian, roam the ruins of an 11th-century Benedictine monastery. A bracing climb up a nearby hill leads to the stocky turret of Fort Royal, from where Napoleon's

*OLD TOWN'S WALLS SEEM TO BE SUSPENDED BETWEEN SEA AND SKY, LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF A FAIRY TALE.*

(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) DAVID CLAPP/GETTY IMAGES; ANADOLU AGENCY/CONTRIBUTOR/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID C TOMLINSON/GETTY IMAGES; ALAN COOKSON - LIVERPOOL/GETTY IMAGES; BIGBEAR JIANG/500PX/GETTY IMAGES



Clockwise from the top: bathing in the Adriatic Sea; one of the cruise boats that ply the coast around Dubrovnik; Sveti Vlaho, the city's patron saint; the cable car on Mount Srd; a vineyard in the Dubrovnik region.


















Clockwise from above: A peacock in Dubrovnik; a woman in medieval garb performs in front of the Church of St. Blaise; the historic City Walls; a bustling evening in Old Town.

occupying troops trained their sights on Old Town's terracotta roofs.

After returning to Old Town, I take a half-hour drive up the coast to Brsečine Harbor, where I board a motorboat and hurtle toward Šipan, the largest of the Elaphiti Islands. The boat docks at BOWA, a family-run restaurant set on a secluded, wooded beach. At this cluster of stilted cabanas and a dinky old stone building that doubles as the kitchen, I tuck into platters of seared tuna belly, swordfish ceviche and grilled octopus. Even the salt is diligently curated, crystalized from local pools.

My extended lunch continues up the coast in Mali Ston, a medieval town known for defensive walls that snake into the hills behind it. I join a small group aboard another boat and head out to a floating platform, where a crew member hauls up a rope festooned with shellfish. Bobbing on the bay, slurping oysters right out of the sea and sipping white wine, it's hard to think of a finer way to spend a sunny afternoon.

That said, I have another historic coastal town to visit: Cavtat, about 13 kilometres southeast of Old Town. We dock beside a pretty promenade bracketed by 15th-century landmarks: Our Lady of the Snows Monastery and the Church of St. Nicholas. Inside the latter is a painting of Christ ascending over the town, which is equally inspiring and panoramic.

*THE RED HISTORY MUSEUM HOUSES A BEGUILING CLUTTER OF ARTIFACTS FROM THE CITY'S TIME UNDER COMMUNIST RULE.*

**I HEAD OUT** the next morning to Gruž, a hip industrial neighbourhood a few minutes north of Old Town. My first stop is Urban & Veggie, a snazzy vegan restaurant across from Luka Gruž harbour. "This is a city of meat lovers," says owner Ivo Dadić, seated on the vine-draped back terrace, watching as I devour a splendid vegan kebab. "People thought I was mad when I opened, but we are changing minds."

It's a short walk to TUP, a complex that's the centerpiece of the neighbourhood's revival. Among the enterprises that have set up in a former carbon graphite factory are a music studio, a brewery and a ceramics workshop.

There's also the Red History Museum, which houses a beguiling clutter of artifacts from the city's decades under Communist rule, including a vintage Yugo car and a series of rooms set up like a typical 1970s Croatian household. Visitors are encouraged to nose through the cabinets, listen to a Beatles cover band

(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) HONEY INTING/EYEEM/GETTY IMAGES; MICHELE WESTMORLAND/GETTY IMAGES; PIOTR JACZEWSKI/GETTY IMAGES; DANNY LEHMAN/GETTY IMAGES



**Tourists explore Old Town, near St. Saviour Church.**

on headphones or tap messages on a clunky typewriter. At one point, I thumb through a magazine that has American actress Linda Evans on the cover. Apparently socialist workers watched *Dynasty*.

After lunch, I take a quick detour to the waterfront Cave Bar More, where you can sip fancy cocktails in a troglodytic setting. I can't help but try the *Game of Thrones* cocktail, made with pink gin, golden falernum, blue Curaçao, tonic and something called "magic mix."

On my way back to Old Town, I catch the Dubrovnik Cable Car, which trundles to the peak of Mount Srd, 412 metres above sea level. The journey up is a nail-biter, but it's a small price to pay for what has to be the best view in town.

Later that afternoon, I meet Ivica Vlašić, who drives me to his family's vineyard 10 kilometres east of the city. Nestled in the foothills of Malaštica mountain, Vardia is not the largest vineyard around, but that's part of its charm. "We do everything ourselves," Vlašić says, leading a small group along a steep trail. "At harvest time, friends help—each chooses a row to pick, and at the end we have a barbecue."

The wine—a crisp, citrusy white—is fantastic, as is the spot where we're drinking it, surrounded by olive, fig and cherry trees, overlooking mountains and sea. "The birds enjoy the vines, too," Vlašić tells us. "My father says that the only reason they eat the grapes is because they've never tried the wine."

Back at Old Town, I take a final sightseeing foray: a walk atop the City Walls, a two-kilometre loop that provides an intimate perspective of the historic quarter. At one point, I turn my attention away from Fort Lovrijenac and lock eyes with a man standing at his kitchen window. The moment serves as a reminder that Dubrovnik is more than a conglomeration of domes or a postcard-pretty sprawl of red roofs. As a local artist had told me earlier: "This is home. I belong here."

*DUBROVNIK IS MORE THAN DOMES OR POSTCARD-PRETTY RED ROOFS. AS A LOCAL ARTIST TOLD ME: "THIS IS HOME."*

Dinner is at Restaurant 360 Dubrovnik, a Michelin-starred standout built into the City Walls, and I take my seat overlooking the old port as the Bell Tower clangs. The food is wonderful, as is the wine, not to mention the view. I can't recall the last time I felt so thoroughly happy. I say this to the guy clearing my table.

He smiles, and says, "Dubrovnik will do that to you." R

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GONZALO AZUMENDI/GETTY IMAGES


Canada
20

# CASHLE$$ CANADA?

## The trend toward digital payments could shortchange this country's most vulnerable

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BY *Lucy Uprichard*
FROM *THE WALRUS*

ILLUSTRATION BY *Paige Stampatori*

## Early in the pandemic, "dirty money" started to take on a new, rather literal, meaning as businesses across Canada banned the use of cash.

Before we understood the coronavirus's aerosol-based transmission, every surface seemed a threat: doorknobs, groceries and, of course, money. By May 2020, the number of "tap and go" transactions escalated so dramatically that the Bank of Canada issued a plea for retailers to continue accepting notes and coins "to ensure Canadians have access to the goods and services they need."

There's no question that printed or minted currency is grubby (paper banknotes, studies demonstrate, can be covered in everything from E. coli to fecal matter). But we now know that its likelihood of spreading the coronavirus is as low as any other high-traffic surface. Still, the reluctance among businesses and consumers to handle money might prove hard to shake. E-commerce has been dethroning cash in Canada throughout the past decade, and experts believe the pandemic has accelerated the trend.

Indeed, according to a 2021 report from Payments Canada, around 40 percent of Canadians say the pandemic made them uncomfortable handling cash. As Canada is projected to face a 70 percent drop in usage by 2030, we have to reckon with the consequences of a mass switch to digital payments.

Those consequences will likely be invisible to those of us who don't have to worry about accessing bank accounts and credit cards. But if you're someone who does have to worry, the digitization of the economy could likely make it difficult to pay for food and transit. In our rush to abandon cash under the guise of progress, are we leaving behind the people who rely on it most?

**IT'S EASY TO** assume that everybody has a bank card or a line of credit, but according to the social-justice group ACORN Canada, 15 percent of Canadians are "underbanked," meaning they have limited interaction with traditional banks, and a further million are estimated to have no bank accounts at all (this may be a conservative figure due to spotty data collection).

Some of these people may simply prefer to use cash or cheques for personal or privacy reasons, but many are excluded due to factors beyond their control: prohibitive banking or ATM fees, no reliable access to bank branches, an inability to qualify for credit, or a lack of knowledge or resources to access digital-banking services. There are many reasons why people may rely on cash, and cash-free policies threaten to further box them out of society.

In areas with few retail options, for example, the trend could seriously jeopardize access to essentials. Back in June 2020, then executive director of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association Michael Bryant told the CBC that pushing people to use electronic payment can "threaten food security" by making it difficult for people to reliably purchase their groceries, adding "another layer of anxiety" to daily life.

Most of these people, according to research, are already low income and marginalized, with Indigenous, disabled, homeless and remote communities the hardest hit. Unlike in certain jurisdictions in the United States, such as Massachusetts, the District of Columbia and New York City, there is no law at any level in Canada that requires retailers to accept cash, a Bank of Canada spokesperson told Global News in 2020. This means that there is no guardrail for those locked out of credit or debit.

**THERE IS NO LAW AT ANY LEVEL IN CANADA THAT REQUIRES RETAILERS TO ACCEPT CASH.**

It's not just making purchases that is difficult for the unbanked and underbanked—receiving payments, including government cheques, can become awfully expensive, as well. The majority of communities in Nunavut, for example, have no bank branches at all. Similar situations exist across parts of Yukon, which can leave some with little choice but to rely on exploitatively priced cheque-cashing stores.

Bonnie Morton, a Saskatchewan antipoverty advocate, told CTV in 2020 that people without bank accounts often face huge fees when cashing cheques at payday-loan operators, which usually charge both a base rate and a percentage of the cheque's value.

If, for example, you needed to cash a $1,000 wage cheque twice a month, a fairly standard fee of $2.99 per cheque plus three percent of the value would

see you losing $32.99 each time, or almost $800 over the entire year. As Morton put it, "A cashless society only works for those with enough money."

Many of Canada's rural and remote communities are also notoriously poorly served by internet services, making it difficult to rely on internet banking alone. And since banks have been shuttering branches at rapid rates for years, with more than 2,000 closing their doors between 1990 and 2017, the situation doesn't look like it will improve any time soon.

**THERE ARE OPTIONS** for solving the cashless quandary without shortchanging the country's most vulnerable—if Canadian officials are willing to put in the effort to make them happen.

One idea that has become popular is the use of prepaid cards: reloadable payment cards that resemble credit or debit cards. Historically, they have been an efficient way for governments to quickly send money to people who don't have access to banking services, since they are easily distributed by mail and give recipients immediate access to funds.

Governments have used them to provide help in a pinch in the past, such as to aid wildfire victims in Alberta, and advocates say prepaid cards could have proved helpful if they had been deployed during the pandemic to distribute the much-needed Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).

To the degree that they have been deployed in Canada, prepaid cards have proved to be fairly successful in distributing benefits; in Ontario, the use of prepaid cards for unemployment and disability programs likely helped recipients avoid cheque-cashing fees and reduced costs for the government by roughly $1.7 million per year.

If adopted more widely, and used for things like federal tax returns and other kinds of government aid, prepaid cards could prove extremely useful for transitioning unbanked and underbanked people into a society that is increasingly cashless.

**MORE THAN 600 MUNICIPALITIES ACROSS CANADA SUPPORT THE IDEA OF POSTAL BANKING.**

Another answer might lie in the busy hands of Canada Post. Many countries, including the U.K., France, Italy and China, use their post offices to offer banking services, both in person and online, at low cost. In rural communities that aren't well served by banks, the initiative has become vital.

Setting up such a service here is not unimaginable: Postal banking was a part of Canadian culture for more than a century, up until corporate lobbying from the banking industry put a stop to it in 1968. Despite continued resistance

from mainstream banks, the concept has gained widespread support; more than 600 municipalities across the country have passed resolutions supporting postal banking.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers supports it, too. In a 2013 paper, researcher and consultant John Anderson argued that traditional banks, with their sparse branch distribution and high fees, have long been failing Canadians. With post offices in more than 1,200 communities underserved by banks, Canada Post's infrastructure—comprising well-established networks integrated into local communities—could be key in expanding financial inclusion to the country's most rural and remote populations.

Widening financial inclusion also means distributing the resources required to engage in digital banking, such as providing low-cost laptops and smartphones to people who can't afford them. We had a preview of what this could look like during the pandemic, when community initiatives supplied electronics to people so they could attend virtual health appointments and to help them ease isolation.

But small-scale, charity-driven outreach can go only so far, especially when it is often limited to urban centres with decent internet service. If Canada is serious about ensuring people can participate in the digital economy, communications devices and internet access arguably need to be seen as a right.

The cashless trend might be inevitable. But there are ways to prevent the unbanked from becoming collateral damage. Canada could provide better access to laptops and phones for those who want them and explore imaginative solutions for those who don't, all while relying on structures and methods that already exist. Financial-inclusion advocates are more than ready to make the change, but the penny has yet to drop more broadly.

© 2022, LUCY UPRICHARD. FROM "WHAT IS THE COST OF A CASHLESS SOCIETY?", *THE WALRUS* (AUGUST 4, 2022), THEWALRUS.CA

## On Gratitude

**Let us be grateful to the people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.**

MARCEL PROUST

**"Thank you" is the best prayer that anyone could say. I say that one a lot. Thank you expresses extreme gratitude, humility, understanding.**

ALICE WALKER

**Breathe. Let go. And remind yourself that this very moment is the only one you know you have for sure.**

OPRAH WINFREY

# Thanks, Mom

*In honour of Mother's Day, we asked readers to share what they have learned from one of life's most influential teachers*

I'M THE YOUNGEST of six children. When I was four, my dad suffered a work accident that left him disabled, so my mom had to take care of him, too. My father's family wanted to separate us kids into the care of different uncles. But my mom told them no, that she would support us. She had never worked before, but she found a job and



ILLUSTRATION BY *Tiffany Dang*





Marisol and her mother, Erendira.

was able to keep a roof over our heads, provide food and send us to school.

So even at age four, I had great admiration for my mother's hard-working attitude. When she got home from work, she would play with us kids outside. We played with a ball, we looked at the sky and the stars, and she always answered our questions. I never heard her say that she was tired; she only wanted to see us happy. I thank my mom because she never gave up.

—MARISOL MARTINEZ SOLANO, *Mexico City*

**WHEN I WAS** a self-centred teenager, my mother, Hélène, would tell me that we don't get points in life for being beautiful or intelligent, because those are traits we are born with. She'd say, "You only get points for being kind, because that is something you have to work at and choose to be." I needed to hear that.

—LISE D'AMOURS, *Casselman, Ont.*

**MY MOM WAS** the most generous, loving person. If she knew of someone who was sick or dealing with hard times, she immediately prepared food for them. Now I do the same for my loved ones. My brother just went into surgery, and I made the family meals to get them through the week. It brings me so much joy to know that I'm helping (and it doesn't hurt that I love to cook).

—BARB KNIEL, *St. Albert, Alta.*

**MOM TAUGHT ME** that everyone has something that drives them. She always said, "If you're passionate about something, go for it and give it your all!" When she got tired of having a boss, she started her own business. And when she had to close her business, she tried something else she was passionate about. She taught me the importance of having priorities.

I don't like my current job. Like my mother, my priorities are my family, my partner and my close friends. So I keep my eyes open, waiting for the opportunity to find the job that fulfills me.

—MAUDE, *Abbeville, France*

**MY MOTHER TAUGHT** me to forgive and forget. That we shouldn't dwell on past grievances, but that instead we should let go of them and move on. My mother and I joked, later in life, that in earlier years we didn't always remember that lesson! But on her deathbed, we forgave each other for being human, one last time. That, I won't forget.

—ELEANOR HOLWERDA, *Victoria, B.C.*

(PHOTO CORNERS) HANIBARAM/GETTY IMAGES; (MARISOL AND HER MOTHER) COURTESY OF MARISOL MARTINEZ SOLANO

**A FEW WEEKS** before I married my husband, my mother took me aside and gave me some advice. Mum and Dad were married for 42 years and had four children. Throughout their marriage, they faced the many challenges that raising a family, juggling finances and having unexpected poor health presented.

Still, Mum is a straight shooter, so I was a little apprehensive as I followed her down the hallway of our family home and into her bedroom that day. After closing the door, she launched into the importance of being sure of the big commitment I was about to make.

Her closing advice left a strong impression on me: "You know, marriage isn't one relationship, it's a series of them," she said. "Be prepared for things to change between you both. As new challenges arise, you'll find that you both change. But if you work together, you'll end up with a better relationship."

This was the best wedding advice—and life lesson—I could have hoped for. And after 24 years of marriage, we're still going strong, warts and all!

—LOUISE WATERSON, *Sydney, Australia*

**MY MOM, "BUNNY,"** would tell it like it is. But she had the wisdom to hold her tongue if saying something would not be helpful. She would tell me: "If you don't have something nice to say, keep your mouth shut." I have heard these words echo in my mind on many occasions, and they have often prevented me from escalating issues.

—STEVE LEWIS, *Redbridge, Ont.*

COURTESY OF A.K.



A.K. and his mother, Alice.

**IN ADDITION TO** the many beautiful and uplifting things my mother taught me, I learned the importance of letting go once your children reach an age when they want to find their way and stand on their own two feet.

Of course, a mother will always see a son or daughter as her child, but we must have the courage to let this child leave the nest when the time comes. This does not mean we stop loving them, but we also show them that we believe in them, that they are strong, and that we stand behind them, no matter where life takes them.

—A.K., *Zurich, Switzerland*

**MY MOTHER PASSED** on a whole world to me. She had studied piano and played regularly at home, bringing the essence of classical music to my young ears. We had an upright piano in the dining room, and I would sit on a stool next to her and watch her play Bach's "The Well-Tempered Clavier," sonatas by Mozart and Beethoven or Debussy's

"Gardens in the Rain." I was fascinated. I started playing the violin when I was seven, and my siblings and I sometimes played together.

Today, I enjoy going to concerts, reading about great composers (I'm currently on Schubert) and I'm taking music-history courses.

My mother gave me such a beautiful gift. The older I get, the more I'm moved by music's infinite richness.

—VINCENT PHILIPPE, *Paris, France*



**Remedios and Mercedes.**

**TO SPEAK OF** my mother, Remedios, is to speak of unconditional and infinite love. She was born in the 1930s, a few months after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, and grew up during the harsh postwar period.

She was extraordinarily resourceful and created a happy and welcoming home for her family and friends. But her affection was always accompanied by the knowledge that to love well, you have to know how to say no to your kids.

I don't remember my mother ever being idle; the only time she sat down was to sew, an activity that became an extra source of income for the family. Also from her blessed hands came magical casseroles and healing caresses.

Her unconditional devotion multiplied when she became a grandmother. Today, her legacy of love lives on in each of us.

—MERCEDES DOMÍNGUEZ, *Madrid, Spain*

**MOTHERS ARE THE** greatest gift in the world. My mom is no exception. She made sure we got a university education, and she worked different jobs to help my dad with the household expenses. She never complained about how hard it was.

Now that I am also a mother, I realize how important a mother's role is: A foundation of the home, the light of the family, the nurturer of children and an inspiration to others. My mom taught me that mothers are very special gifts from God—gifts that can never be bought and are always available.

—MARICARL GARCIA, *Manila, Philippines*

**MY FATHER'S DEATH** pulled the rug out from under my mother, in part because she had no other close relationships aside from him, my sister and me. Her life revolved around her family. From that experience, I have learned that it is important to focus not only on family, but also to build a broad emotional base with friendships. This gives me support and resilience when life is more difficult.

—DOMINIQUE GRAF, *Zurich, Switzerland*

COURTESY OF MERCEDES DOMÍNGUEZ


Debbie and her mother, Ruby.

COURTESY OF DEBBIE BROWNE

**MY MOTHER TAUGHT** me so much about life, both intentionally and by example. Having had six children, she was very busy trying to make ends meet in the 1950s and ’60s. We were fortunate to have some land, and my mom taught me how to be as self-sufficient as possible by canning, curing, freezing and preserving our own food. She also taught me to be more patient, compassionate and empathetic.

From my mother, I learned one of my most valuable life lessons: that we have the power to make our own lives happier, healthier and more meaningful than we realize.

—DEBBIE BROWNE, *Spruce Grove, Alta.*

**BEING AROUND MY** mother is like never leaving school. Dona Glaucia is an endless source of knowledge. Throughout my 30 years of life so far, this independent woman has showed me how to live with my head held high, to own my choices and not to linger over the difficulties but do what needs to be done. Thanks to her, I learned that a suburban Black man has the right to dream and the duty to make that dream come true.

My mom, who is a nurse, always makes time for me—she finishes a chaotic shift and still finds the energy to ask me about my day, and she truly listens. She is always giving the best version of herself.

—WALTER FARIAS, *Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*

**MY MOM’S GREATEST** lesson to me is that kindness never gets old or boring. Whether it is a smile for a stranger, holding a door open for someone or giving to a charitable cause, the rewards for making even a small difference seem endless.

—TAMMY ALAGIERSKI, *Mississauga, Ont.*

**MY MOTHER HAD** some funny yet wise suggestions when it came to finding a partner, such as, “If you want to meet a man, walk around the hardware store. You might meet a nice *and* handy man.” And: “If you see an attractive man, go up to him. Don’t wait for a man to come to you. You might wait a long time.”

Other gems of advice she shared:

- “Never wear elasticized pants. To stay slim, be aware of your waistline.”
- “A cup of tea enjoyed alone or with a friend is therapeutic and soothing.”
- “Always get ahead of constipation; deal with it before it becomes chronic.”

Above all, she taught me to be kind, especially in marriage and toward those who need it the most.

—JOAN MCCANN, *Toronto*

# *Brain* GAMES

SHARPEN YOUR MIND

## Fun At The Fair

**EASY** Mira is taking Adam, Bobby, Caroline and Didi to the fairgrounds for a fun trip to celebrate the start of summer. Each child has a favourite food and carnival ride. With the clues below, can you figure out what each child's choice of snack and ride is? The choices are: roller coasters, the Ferris wheel, bumper cars, merry-go-round, cotton candy, hot dogs, ice cream and candy apples.



**1.** The one who likes roller coasters also likes cotton candy.
**2.** The one who likes the Ferris wheel hates hot dogs and ice cream.
**3.** Adam thinks the Ferris wheel is too slow and the roller coaster is too fast.
**4.** One child likes bumper cars and hot dogs.
**5.** Bobby can't wait to get to the merry-go-round.
**6.** Caroline likes to be high above everyone on the Ferris wheel.

---

## Number Maze

**MEDIUM** In this maze, start at the 5 in the top-left corner and move horizontally or vertically (but never diagonally) to reach the star in the bottom-right corner. At each move, travel in only one direction the same number of squares as the number in the cell you are currently on. Since you are starting on a cell containing 5, your next move is either 5 squares to the right or 5 squares down. The next move will be based on your new cell's number. Can you find the path?

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| 5 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 2 | ★ |

FUN AT THE FAIR BY BETH SHILLIBEER; NUMBER MAZE BY FRASER SIMPSON

## Good Luck

**DIFFICULT**

1 → 1
3 → 9
5 → 7
7 → ?
9 → 9
11 → 4

Using two simple calculations, each number on the left is transformed to the one on the right. What is the missing number for 7? Hint: If you start with a low number, the second step doesn't do anything much.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | C | |
| | C | | B |
| | C | A | |
| A | | | |

## Set Free

**DIFFICULT** Place an A, B or C in each empty cell of this grid. No three consecutive cells in a horizontal, vertical or diagonal line may contain a set of identical letters (such as B-B-B) or a set of three different letters (such as C-A-B). Can you ensure a set-free grid?

## Alterations While You Wait

**MEDIUM** You're in need of a 20 in a hurry, and all you have is a 1. You can change the number you have into a new number in any of the following ways, but it's going to cost you:

- Add 5: $15
- Divide by 2: $3
- Subtract 4: $2
- Multiply by 3: $8
- Add 7: $13
- Subtract 6: $4
- Multiply by 5: $24
- Subtract 1: $5

What's the cheapest way you can get exactly 20?

*For answers, turn to* PAGE 92

GOOD LUCK BY DARREN RIGBY; SET FREE BY FRASER SIMPSON; ALTERATIONS WHILE YOU WAIT BY DARREN RIGBY

# SUDOKU

BY *Louis-Luc Beaudoin*

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | | | 2 | 4 | | | | |
| 2 | | | 9 | | | 7 | | 4 |
| 1 | | | | | 5 | | 9 | |
| | | | 8 | 3 | | 2 | | |
| | | 6 | | | | | 7 | 5 |
| | 9 | | | | 6 | 1 | | |
| | 4 | | | 1 | 3 | 5 | | |
| | | 1 | 6 | | 2 | | | 8 |
| | 2 | | | | | 9 | | |

**To Solve This Puzzle**
Put a number from 1 to 9 in each empty square so that:

✦ every horizontal row and vertical column contains all nine numbers (1-9) without repeating any of them;

✦ each of the outlined 3 x 3 boxes has all nine numbers, none repeated.

## SOLUTION

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 1 |
| 2 | 6 | 5 | 9 | 8 | 1 | 7 | 3 | 4 |
| 1 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 9 | 2 | 8 |
| 5 | 1 | 7 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 9 | 6 |
| 3 | 8 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 9 | 4 | 7 | 5 |
| 4 | 9 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 6 | 1 | 8 | 3 |
| 9 | 4 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 6 | 2 |
| 7 | 5 | 1 | 6 | 9 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 8 |
| 6 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 8 | 9 | 1 | 7 |

# BRAIN GAMES ANSWERS

FROM PAGE 90

**Fun At The Fair**
Adam likes hot dogs and bumper cars; Bobby likes ice cream and the merry-go-round; Caroline likes candy apples and the Ferris wheel; Didi likes cotton candy and the roller coaster.

**Number Maze**
The correct sequence of moves is: down 5, right 4, left 2, up 4, left 1, down 3, up 1, right 4, down 2.

**Good Luck**
7 ⟶ 13. Square the number, then add up the digits in your answer.

**Set Free**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | A | C | A |
| B | C | C | B |
| A | C | A | A |
| A | A | C | A |

**Alterations While You Wait**
Add 7 (8, $13), multiply by 3 (24, $21), subtract 4 (20, $23).

# WORD POWER

**This issue,** we're all about keeping it brief with a roundup of useful acronyms from the worlds of IT, HR and EMS, among others. Pronouncing them is as easy as ABC: Just recite the letters and you'll be GTG. ID these terms ASAP, then turn the page to see the answers spelled out.

BY *Samantha Rideout*

**1. TBD**
**A** to be determined
**B** terribly bad day
**C** tactical business development

**2. ESL**
**A** earnings, savings and loans
**B** elementary-school level
**C** English as a second language

**3. DOE**
**A** date of event
**B** depends on experience
**C** day off due to exhaustion

**4. P&L**
**A** parsley and lemon
**B** position and location
**C** profit and loss

**5. GMO**
**A** genetically modified organism
**B** give me one
**C** guaranteed mail order

**6. SEP**
**A** someone else's problem
**B** solar energy production
**C** seismic event prediction

**7. PS**
**A** print supplement
**B** postscript
**C** parting statement

**8. ABC**
**A** against book censorship
**B** airway, breathing and circulation
**C** access to basic care

**9. URL**
**A** uniform resource locator
**B** underground racing league
**C** upper range limit

**10. ROM**
**A** royal order of merit
**B** rate of mortality
**C** range of motion

**11. SPF**
**A** sensor pixel format
**B** sun-protection factor
**C** single-parent family

**12. SFPF**
**A** system for physical fitness
**B** salty, fast or processed food
**C** smoke-free, pet-free

**13. TMI**
**A** test of machine intelligence
**B** too much information
**C** toxic materials index

**14. LCD**
**A** low-cholesterol diet
**B** liquid-crystal display
**C** local courier delivery

**15. JGI**
**A** just Google it
**B** junior-grade infantry
**C** judgment of guilt or innocence

## An Acronym That Isn't



**Many think SOS is short for "save our ship," but it doesn't really stand for anything! This sequence of letters was chosen because it's easy to type in Morse code and hard to mistake for anything else. When the *Titanic* was sinking, it transmitted SOS signals and another, now-defunct emergency call: CQD, which, according to unofficial sources, could have been derived from the French "sécurité" or the English "seek you." What is certain is that "D" stood for danger or distress.**

---

## Word Power ANSWERS

**1. TBD (A)** *to be determined*
The band's exact dates and venues for their summer tour are TBD.

**2. ESL (C)** *English as a second language*
Mr. Jacobs spoke slowly to help his ESL students follow along.

**3. DOE (B)** *depends on experience*
Andréanne felt hesitant to apply for jobs that listed the salary as DOE.

**4. P&L (C)** *profit and loss*
Every publicly traded company must issue P&L statements regularly.

**5. GMO (A)** *genetically modified organism*
So far, there are no signs that GMOs are unsafe for human consumption.

**6. SEP (A)** *someone else's problem*
Malcolm dismissed the fallen stop sign as SEP and kept walking.

**7. PS (B)** *postscript*
Sara added a hasty PS to her email after realizing she'd left out a key piece of information.

**8. ABC (B)** *airway, breathing and circulation*
The paramedic checked Lev's ABCs and concluded he wouldn't need CPR.

**9. URL (A)** *uniform resource locator*
Ravneet typed in the URL of the store's website to check the return policy.

**10. ROM (C)** *range of motion*
Debbie worried about losing the ROM in her arthritic shoulder.

**11. SPF (B)** *sun-protection factor*
Bill's skin burned easily, so he always chose a high-SPF sunscreen.

**12. SFPF (C)** *smoke-free, pet-free*
Used furniture sells more easily when it's from an SFPF home.

**13. TMI (B)** *too much information*
Nefeli wondered if some of the details in her story were TMI.

**14. LCD (B)** *liquid-crystal display*
The salesperson rattled on about the advantages of LCD TV screens.

**15. JGI (A)** *just Google it*
When his brother texted him asking how to boil an egg, Pranjal told him: JGI.

### Vocabulary Ratings

**9 & BELOW:** OK
**10–12:** VG
**13–15:** A1

TEMNIY/GETTY IMAGES

# TRIVIA

BY *Beth Shillibeer*



CTRPHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES

**1.** What Guinness world record did actor John Cena set in 2022 for his work with the Make-A-Wish Foundation?

**2.** Bloomberg Philanthropies' Asphalt Art Initiative has awarded 19 European cities grants to do what in 2023?

**3.** Developed in the late 1930s, what sport is played on horseback, using a stick to capture the ball and score?

**4.** What chocolate bar has a version infused with sake, giving it an alcohol content of up to 0.8 percent?

**5.** Which seabird will fly the equivalent distance of nearly three times to the moon and back over its 30-year lifespan?

**6.** Trucks playing Beethoven's "Für Elise" travel through Taiwan gathering what?

**7.** What does it mean if a docked ship is flying the flag "Blue Peter"?

**8.** Which country shares a border with every other South American country except Ecuador and Chile?

**9.** Mr. Potato Head had a body made of what until 1964?

**10.** What global milestone did the human race reach on November 15, 2022?

**11.** In 1894, Luis Coloma rewrote the story of Ratoncito Pérez to comfort eight-year-old King Alfonso XIII of Spain when he lost what?

**12.** Ancient cultures were known to use what sweet and sticky substance as a food preservative?

**13.** Museums in Toronto and New York are employing what smartphone technology to superimpose images on nature and colourize ancient sculptures in many of their exhibits?

**14.** Cleopatra had her portrait carved into what gemstones?

**15.** Who wrote the "No. 1" book series, about a Botswanan woman who opens an investigative business?

---

**Answers: 1.** Most wishes granted (650). **2.** Paint public murals. **3.** Polocrosse. **4.** Kit Kat. **5.** Arctic tern. **6.** Garbage. **7.** Ready to sail, all aboard. **8.** Brazil. **9.** A real potato. **10.** A population of eight billion. **11.** A tooth. **12.** Honey (its high sugar content kills micro-organisms). **13.** Augmented reality. **14.** Emeralds. **15.** Alexander McCall Smith (No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency).



A TRUSTED FRIEND IN A COMPLICATED WORLD

*Stripes and Feathers* by Jacqui Oakley, exclusively for *Reader's Digest*


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it feels like it's
barely there"
-Kate
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always discreet
always discreet
This is the bladder leak protection we deserve
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